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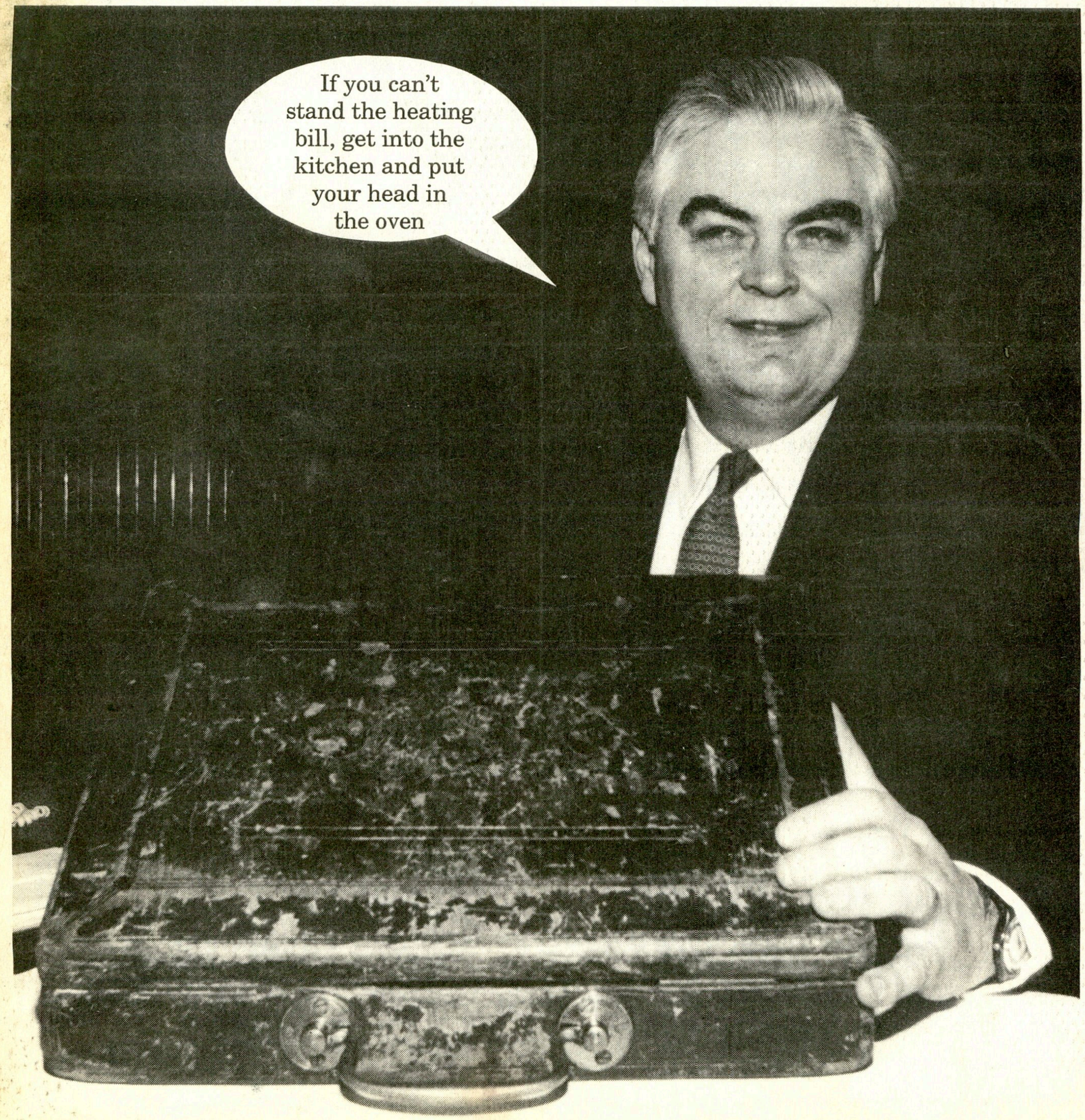
March '93

PRIVATE EYE

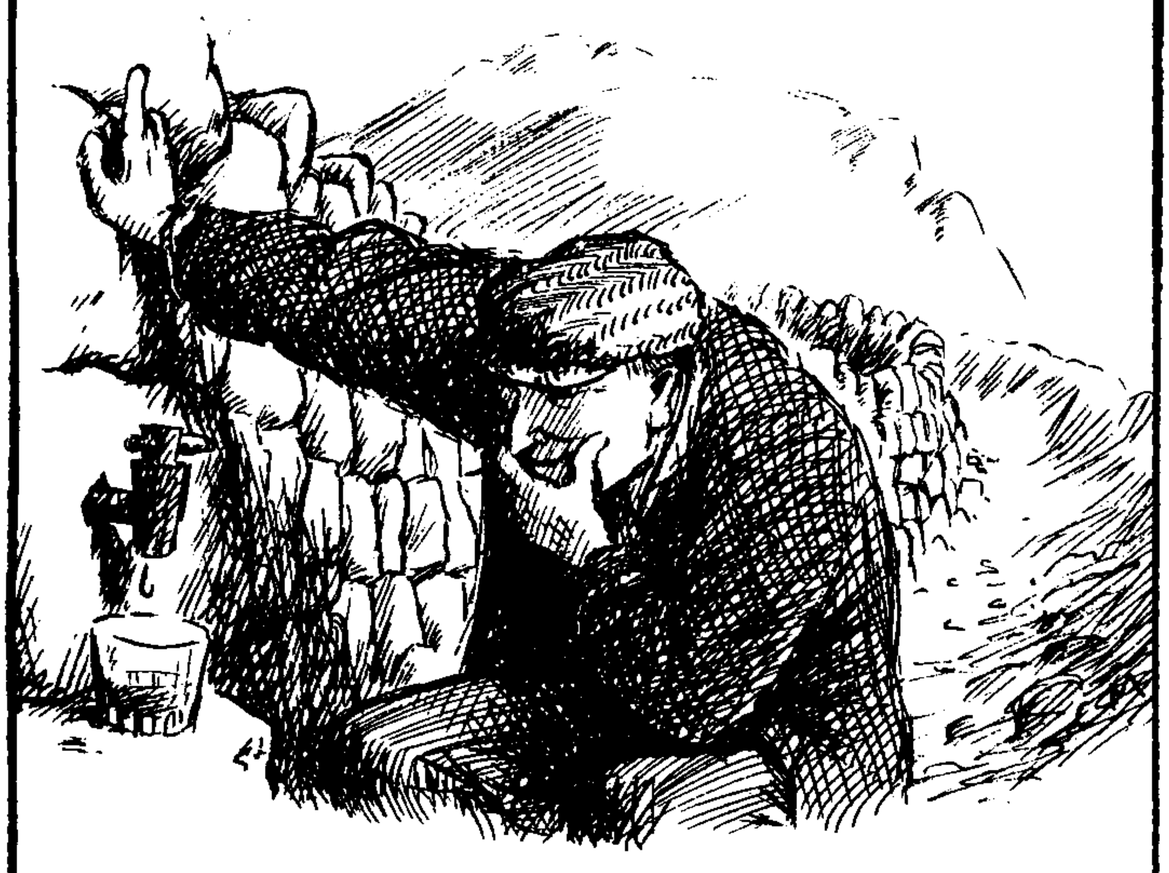
80p

LAMONT WOOS OAPs



A cure for the dry stone.

AN ANCIENT PRACTICE among *dry stone 'wall~ies'* has been relayed to us. Apparently, on completion of a wall, a DRAM OF WHISKY was traditionally embedded in its centre.



Who this was meant to appease is open to question, but certainly ED and MARY PERRY of Dry Stane Dyking used to have unaccountable problems with their walls until they hit on the notion of inserting a dram of *their favourite The Macallan.* Since then the SHERRY OAK BLANDISHMENTS of The Malt have worked their magic.

What do they leave ~ *A WHOLE BOTTLE?*

'Just a wee nip,' says Mary.

'Or else we'd have the *whole neighbourhood* at the wall with *CROWBARS.*'

The Macallan. The Malt.

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Gnome

New Look For *Eye*

FROM today *Private Eye* has an entirely new look. After 31 years, the magazine has been redesigned with a new column width of 225.7mm, with enlarged side-margins, to make it easier to read. A realigned fontage gives the page a clearer, more incisive, feel.

Most importantly, we have changed the typeface. The familiar Indepenti Sans Idea face gives way to Whittam Bold, which owes its origin to the 16th century printer St Whittam, who published his famous 24-volume *Codex Idiotorum* for Count Andreas the Foolish, Duke of Strobini. We are confident that the overall effect will be to make the paper even more boring than it was already.

E. Strobes
pp Lord Gnome
The *Indescribably-unreadable*
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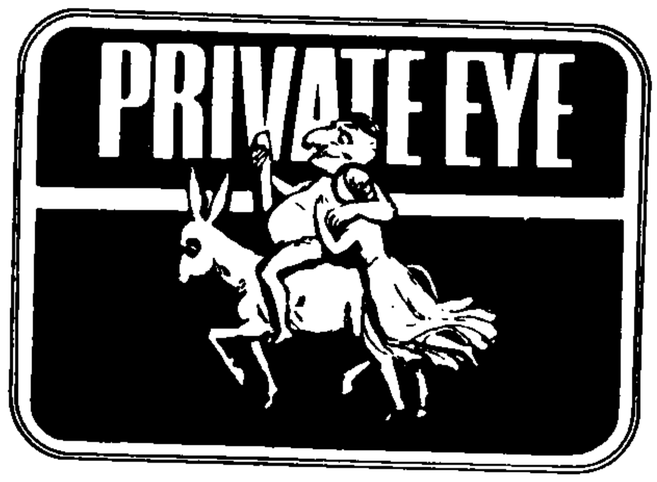


COLOUR SECTION

WHEN Norman Lamont tried to justify his imposition of value added tax on domestic fuel and power by presenting it as a contribution to enhanced greenery and energy saving, he was talking through his bottom.

His claim that it was "a nonsense" to charge VAT on loft insulation and not on fuel was the purest humbug. The obvious way to end the "anomaly", as he called it, would be to remove VAT from all goods that improve energy efficiency — not only loft insulation, but draught excluders, cavity wall fillings, double glazing and generators using combined heat and power.

All of them reduce demand, either by improving warmth and comfort and thus encouraging less use of energy, or by using the energy more efficiently. Lamont's action will only force people on the lowest incomes to cut back and catch hypothermia; while those above the poverty line will simply spend more and use the same amount of energy. His "solution" will have no effect on overall demand — but it will increase the flow of tax revenue to a bankrupt government.

THE BIGGEST con in Norman Lamont's budget was his announcement about the Channel tunnel high-speed rail link.

Either, like three years ago, it will not go ahead because the private sector will prove too greedy in demanding government support. Or it will go ahead, with the private sector taking the government and the taxpayer for a high speed ride, which will, of course, be described as a "good bargain".

If the government, which is supposed to be strapped for cash, were really interested in saving money, it would allow British Rail to build the line. As a public investment, even at the treasury's unchanged 8 percent rate of discount, it would be far cheaper than the kind of return the private sector will expect to make.

This time, of course, the private sector has the perfect incentive to be greedy: Lamont's publicly-announced commitment to ensure the line is built.

● *More HP on page 5.*

THE CURRENT interest in shipping chartering at the Ministry of Defence has prompted one *Eye* source to hark back nearly 20 years — to 1974, and not terribly salubrious army administrative offices at Andover.

One unit there was run by Col. Douglas Harding. Two of his underlings were Major Ron Cockings, whose duties were mainly clerical, and Major Colin Phillips. All three went on to much more important jobs. Harding became the man in charge of chartering ships for the Ministry of Defence; Cockings got a job with Hogg Robinson, the government freight agency, whose chairman, David Norbury, and managing director, Peter Tween, have recently mysteriously left their posts; and Phillips became a director of the Bournemouth shipping company, EC Transport.

EC Transport was mentioned in the last *Eye*. The reference prompted a jovial phone call from director Ian Ryecroft, who points out that the fact that his firm's dangerous chemicals were loaded on the ferry Herald of Free Enterprise before its last fatal voyage from Zeebrugge was not EC Transport's fault at all. The chemicals, he assures us, had been booked on another more suitable vessel but were loaded on the passenger ferry by mistake.

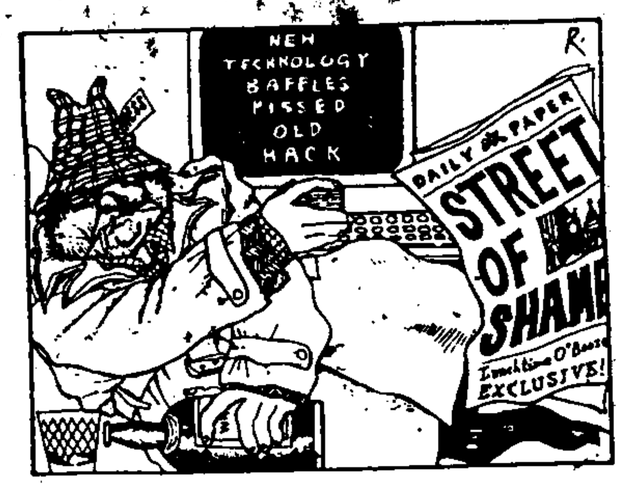
MARKET TESTING, the government's new "initiative" to pump public money into the pockets of its supporters in small business, has provided another wonderful bonanza for the big accounting firms. The point of market testing, of course, is to ensure that every possible contract from a public body enjoys the full advantages of free competition: ie, is put out to open tender.

Here are some examples of what that means. The Overseas Development Agency has awarded its market testing consultancy contract to Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte without putting it out to tender. The Office of the Minister for the Civil Service, which has been most hysterical in its insistence that other people must put contracts out to tender, has appointed Ernst and Young advisers on market testing — without going to tender. And the Natural Resources Institute has appointed the other one of the "big three" accountants — KPMG Peat Marwick — without a tender. The Ministry for Agriculture Fisheries and Food has announced it will be awarding a contract to study market testing, though the lucky firm isn't yet known. One thing is certain, though: there won't be a tender.

THE CURRENT DISPUTE between the management of London Buses' ten subsidiaries and their 13,000 drivers and platform staff, which has already led to two one-day stoppages, is due to escalate into a full strike, as the staff desperately try to force privatisation off the road. Apart from their understandable concern over job losses, their other main bone of contention is pensions.

Here they have a point. LB staff pension contributions are paid into the London Transport (LT) fund, currently involved in a dispute over its healthy surplus of £406 million. LT has contributed two-thirds to the fund and now naturally claims the right to use this surplus as it sees fit, following the example of private sector corporate giants such as Lucas Aerospace and, er, Robert Maxwell.

In a bizarre twist, the dispute has united such unions as the T&G, NUR and TSA in an alliance to fight LT for control of the fund. Things are now expected to go legal.



IN A LETTER to the *Eye* last month, *Observer* editor Donald "Pixie" Trelford angrily denied that his organ's circulation was drooping. "The relaunched Magazine has succeeded in its primary aim of keeping the *Observer*'s sale comfortably over 500,000," he boasted.

Not for long, however. On Sunday 14 March, sales of the *Observer* fell to just 504,000. Following a rise in the paper's cover-price to 90p — pushed through by Trelford against the advice of staff who believe it to be suicidal — the figure is almost certain to slide below half a million within a few weeks.

At the beginning of 1992, addressing a staff party to celebrate the *Observer*'s bicentenary, an exhilarated Trelford announced: "If the circulation isn't over 600,000 by the end of the year I shall resign." Increasingly disgruntled hacks are still waiting.

THE behaviour of Marje Proops, *doyenne* of agony aunts, is becoming ever odder. In her new advice column in the *Sunday Mirror* three weeks ago, she printed a letter from a young man about a traditional "passing-out" ceremony which he would soon have to endure at the end of his apprenticeship as an engineer: "The men tie the apprentice down on a bench, then some of the women strip him from the waist down and oil his private parts. This will happen in front of everyone, including the girls I work with. I am petrified at the thought of being exposed like this..."

Did dear Marje, such a zealous foe of rape and sexual harassment, have any helpful suggestions?

Hardly. "I am afraid there's not a lot you can do, other than grit your teeth and bare it," she wrote. "Close your eyes and think of England and try to see it as the joke it's intended to be. And when it's all over, you'll be the man your father expects you to be."

Will Marje offer the same advice the next time she hears from a woman who has been sexually humiliated? We shall see.

THE *Sunset Times* — which has long boasted of not running "advertorial" features — has at last succumbed to the same baser elements (i.e. cash) that afflict so many other unworthy Fleet Street editors. In relaunching the *Sunday Times Scotland* as a tartan tabloid this month, the organ featured a three-page advertising puff for the Scottish Marketing Show written by business hack Colin Calder.

During the paper's previous relaunch, in 1990, Calder said that not only did the *ST* not run advertorials but that one of the reasons for the downfall of the *Observer's* Scottish supplement was that it was a tabloid!

BEFORE the March 2 editorial conference, "Brillo" made it clear to his senior editors that "that tabloid journalist" will not be writing for his paper.

He was referring to the recent recruitment of Anne Robinson from the *Daily Mirror* by *Today* editor Richard Stott. Under the terms agreed by News International chief executive Andrew Knight, Robinson is to receive £209,000 in return for writing for both *Toady* and the *Sunday Times*. Neill, however, does not see things quite that way. "She can do the odd book review," he grudgingly conceded.

MARTIN "Sweety" Walker, the *Grauniad*'s fragrant Washington correspondent, wrote an indignant piece last month about how he had discovered the shortcomings of the American health-care system when his wife accidentally cut her arm.

Their local hospital, he claimed, kept her waiting for ages, even though she was bleeding copiously, and then refused to treat her anyway. She was forced to drive herself to another hospital (with her arm still "dripping blood"), where she had to wait all day before a surgeon called Doctor Dick (a name Walker found quite hilarious) deigned to stitch up her arm.

Walker's heart-tugging yarn was read with interest by staff at the two hospitals, whose recollection of events was rather different. Whereas Walker wrote that his wife had been "exsanguinating" and had lost "one or two pints of blood" on the floor of the waiting room, in fact she lost hardly any blood and did not bleed on the floor at all.

The supposedly intolerable time she had to wait was all of six minutes. She was transferred to another hospital merely to speed up her treatment, as the surgeons at the first hospital were busy. She was operated on within half an hour. Mrs Walker told the hospital she was very impressed with the care she had received.

THE BLOOD-LETTING at the *Daily Mirror* continues unabated. Another batch of hacks was fired last week, including old lags with 30 years' service such as Ronald Ricketts and John Jackson (the latter may also have succumbed to the Curse of Gnome, as the co-author of Cap'n Bob's book about the *Eye*, *Malice in Wonderland*).

Some of the unlucky victims were taken out to the pub for a consolation drink by one of the few *Mirror* hacks to survive the purge, Alastair McQueen. Half way into the first Scotch, McQueen got a message summoning him back to the office — where he was curtly informed that he too was sacked.

Meanwhile the architect of all this chaos, Mirror Group chief executive David "Rommel" Montgomery, is beginning to worry lest his financial backers notice that his "reforms" have brought nothing but shattered morale and plummeting circulation. To brighten up the next annual report to shareholders, he has commissioned photographer Bill Rowntree (whose previous job was to snap Cap'n Bob shaking hands with the famous) to visit *Mirror* offices around the country and take carefully-staged pictures of happy, smiling workers. Montgomery's brief to Rowntree includes a strict instruction that everyone in the photographs must be under the age of 35 — presumably so that the City will be impressed by the company's youthful vibrancy.

IN THE *Spectator*'s Diary column last week, *Harpers & Queen* editor Vicki Woods wrote of the lengths some people will go to to find jobs for their offspring. She quoted a letter she had just been sent by a Fleet Street editor: "My daughter is very beautiful, talented, witty and intelligent and hard-working. She is writing to you herself, could you possibly arrange for her to be interviewed".

La Woods did not identify the sender of this desperate string-pulling missive. It was in fact Eve Pollard, editor of the *Sunday Express*.

HOW DIFFICULT it must be to write a Sunday newspaper column if you are not a professional hack — even when you are paid £1,800 to perform this irksome chore.

On 14 March dim-witted minor royal Marina Mowatt ran an item in her *Sunday Express* column about the new social acceptability of bingo. "The bingo scene, it seems, is moving away from its drab image of smoked-filled halls with blue-rinsed women sipping pints of lager," she wrote. Bingo "has moved into the nineties by becoming high-tech and politically correct... Gone are ping-pong balls and 'two fat ladies'. Numbers are now displayed on computers and prize money can be anything up to £50,000. What's more, even society balls and charity fund-raising activities among the titled include bingo."

How strange then that on March 9 the *Evening Standard* carried a piece by freelance hack Jeremy Langmead about bingo. "It goes with lager and fags. It conjures up images of smoke-filled halls and rainy afternoons... The nineties have also seen the game become high-tech and politically correct... Numbers are displayed on computers, not ping-pong balls, and there is no more calling out 'two fat ladies'. And the prize money can be huge, up to £50,000... And bingo is not being restricted to the halls. It is played at balls and charity fund-raisers too." Langmead is furious that Mowatt lifted his copy (it wasn't from a common press release) and has written to her editor Eve Bollard to offer her his services at a fraction of Mowatt's cost.

Again on 14 March, Mowatt had an item about Derek Hatton's fraud trial, dubbing it "the case of the snappiest law suit". She wrote: "Hatton became more colourful as the evidence became duller. Sombre suits gave way to designer jackets; ties became more decorative, his tan deeper, the after-shave stronger — and his smirk wider."

Yet on 13 March a report by *Daily Express* hack Derek Hornby had suggested that the Hatton trial could become known as "the case of the law suits". Hornby wrote: "He started the trial in sombre suits, with a tie and face to match. But as the case progressed his cheeky smirk crept back... Hatton put most of his expensive wardrobe on display as suits gave way to designer jackets and blazers. The after-shave became stronger, the ties brighter, the tan deeper."

It is nice to see that Lord Stevens of Ludgate is paying Ms Mowatt a fortune to "borrow" copy from the *Daily Express* (whose editor is La Bollard's husband, Sir Nick Lloyd).

HUNT NEWS

LAST MONTH the *Eye* reported how the Cheshire Constabulary arrested and charged four saboteurs with violent disorder when they voluntarily turned up at Crewe police station to offer witness statements about an assault on a fellow saboteur by a member of the Cheshire Beagles Hunt. We have since received a letter from one of their number, Ms Catherine White, who enclosed a copy of her letter of complaint to Cheshire Constabulary.

Having witnessed the beating unconscious of a young woman called Helen Mackrell, Ms White gave her name and address to an officer at the scene, who suggested that she should report the matter to Crewe Police Station. When she turned up to do so she was arrested and charged with violent disorder. "I was informed by the... officers that the arrest was purely procedure in cases involving hunting and that I probably would not be charged. I feel that the officers treated my being arrested as a trivial matter and something that would allow them to speed up the gathering of evidence concerning the assault." Ms White was detained for a couple of hours, then released on police bail. This has since been extended twice.

NEW LOOK
Andreas
JOHN KENT
THE 'INDEPENDENT' HAS BEEN SO SUCCESSFUL...
THAT OUR BANKERS AND I THOUGHT IT BEST TO CHANGE EVERYTHING.
NEW NEWS NEW STYLE NEWS

NO WONDER Michael Heseltine has delayed his white paper on coal, promised "early in the new year" but finally expected this week.

With PowerGen and National Power building coal import terminals — by coincidence, of course, and not as part of any cartel, which would run counter to the idea of privatisation and the introduction of competition into the electricity industry — the generators' strategy is plain. They want to be able to shop around and burn gas, orimulsion, oil or coal, British or imported. They do not want to be contracted to buy stated amounts of British coal every year for ever, and they want to see a small industry of 12-14 pits.

British Coal's bosses, meanwhile, are aching to be privatised. They have seen the way top salaries in other privatised companies have risen and they want a piece of the action. They were told by the Rothschild report on coal that the industry could only be sold if reduced to 12-14 pits. So that is what they want, too.

The treasury is also desperate to sell the industry and collect the money. It does not want to have to face the massive expenditure that will be called for by new environmental regulations requiring us to burn clean coal. That would mean investing in research, and if we stay a major coal producer the pressure to find advanced methods of burning coal will be irresistible. If we have only 12-14 pits, our contribution from burning coal to *global warming* will be insignificant and we can avoid big spending.

Ranged against these arguments are public opinion, the spectre of 30,000 lost jobs and perhaps 100,000 more that depend on the industry, and the possibility of another parliamentary humiliation for the Tories.

The subsidy-prone Heseltine, right up until last week, was fighting an uphill battle against his dryer cabinet colleagues. He must now hope that the public uproar that greeted his pit announcement in October has blown itself out and, with the help of influential MPs like Sir Marcus Fox, that his wheeler-dealering will pacify revolting backbench Tory MPs — at the expense of 130,000 extra on the dole and a country that depends on imports for light and heat.

● IT IS quite likely that the calculations used by Michael Heseltine over the last five months to "prove" that gas-fired power stations are cheaper than coal-fired stations are completely bogus.

An explosion in the price of oil is now being forecast by informed City observers, who note that the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec), is close to its maximum output. This is an indication that it may at any time increase the price of oil, which in turn will mean an increase in the price of gas (it comes from the same wells and is index-linked to the oil price).

The rise will throw into havoc all the studies produced for President Hezza by learned consultants. As one expert said: "In the past, every time OPEC has put up its price, in 1967, 1973 and 1978, virtually everyone has failed to anticipate it. If it happens, it will make the gas contracts much more expensive and coal will come into its own."

OIL companies have been making £200 million a year out of the petroleum revenue tax, the special 83 percent tax on oil, Norman Lamont revealed in his budget.

While the oil companies have routinely screamed in outrage at this special tax on their activities, behind the scenes they and their accountants have successfully countered the damage.

The trick was accomplished by what Lamont politely called "the uniquely generous allowances" — rather more generous than those extended to those who consume, rather than sell, energy...

SIR MARCUS FOX, the humble Tory MP who runs Britain (because he holds sway over the cro-magnon backbenchers who make up the government's wafer-thin majority) faces a problem over coal.

Normally he would play a pivotal role marshalling Tory MPs as they respond to Michael Heseltine's long-awaited white paper on the industry. But for reasons of his own Sir Marcus might be torn on the issue.

Loyally he will want to support whatever efforts the government makes to keep coal alive, but he will have to juggle this with a duty to his shareholders to reduce the domestic industry and so make way for more imports.

Fox is a director of the Bristol Port Company, which with National Power has spent £80 million on a new coal import terminal. This will be used to bring in cheap, subsidised coal from abroad, some of it produced by child-slaves in Colombia — a country that John Baker, chief executive of National Power, has described as "reputable". It will be interesting to see how the foxy Sir Marcus reacts.

IT WOULD have been interesting to have heard Sir Edward Heath's comment on the situation in China after Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd's statement in the Commons on the future of Hong Kong.

Sir Edward has obligingly notified the Members Interests Register that he is development adviser to the China Investment and Development Fund Ltd and Kleinwort Benson China Management Ltd, which presumably do not produce dinner and tea sets.

NO SURPRISE that the lucrative public affairs account for the privatisation of the railways has been awarded to City agency Dewe Rogerson. For not only have they handled previous privatisations but they also have financial connections with two Conservative MPs and Members' wives.

In the latest Register of Members' Interests, Quentin Davies, Tory Member for Stamford and Spalding and a former member of the Diplomatic Corps, who has singularly failed to shine in House, lists himself as a director of Dewe Rogerson Consultants Ltd. Euro-crackpot MP for Strasbourg East Hugh Dykes is a shareholder in Dewe Rogerson Ltd. And the Dewe Rogerson group employs Dyke's wife Sue and Kathryn, wife of Simon Coombes (Tory, Swindon) in the public affairs department.

Meanwhile, press officers at the Department of Transport are not returning telephone enquiries regarding the budget for the promotion. A member of staff explained: "I didn't know there was any limit, but I'll have to get someone to check".

Three phone calls and a week later — still no response!

THERE IS much hand-wringing in the racing pigeon-infested streets of Sheffield, courtesy of David Blunkett, Labour MP for Sheffield Attercliffe.

According to Blunkett, a former leader of the ultra-spendthrift city council, the government's decision to underwrite nearby Manchester's £2.5 billion olympic bid is a "scandal and deeply damaging to Sheffield".

Blunkett is particularly annoyed that Manchester is getting new multi-million pound sports stadiums (whether or not it wins the nomination) which will outclass the state-of-the-art structures built in Sheffield for the 1991 world student games. He claims no international organiser will touch Sheffield once superior facilities are in place in Manchester.

But Blunkett is being economical with the truth. The reason the sporting world is shunning Sheffield has nothing to do with Manchester and everything to do with Sheffield's monumental cock-up in hosting the games which Blunkett, among other local Labour politicians, swore would be a storming success. They lost £25 million.

"This is the queue to depose Yeltsin!"

WHEN Sarah Sands interviewed former defence minister Alan Clark for the *Evening Standard* at his stately pile Saltwood Castle, she stole a glance at the manuscript of his diaries, which are due for publication this summer.

Among many items that had been queried by the libel lawyer's blue pencil she found a reference that had apparently been ticked as passed for publication. It described one of her former romantic admirers, *Sunday Express* columnist and government press officer Bruce Anderson, as a "fat creep".

Really! Has Mr. Clark lost all sense of decorum?

ROBERT "Gillette" Horton, for whom the price of failure as chairman of BP was a £1.5 million pay-off, looks like losing his current job as chairman of Railtrack.

Whitehall's bewildered rail privatisers are "increasingly convinced" (to quote one of them) that the whole idea of an independent track authority is "an expensive luxury" or, in the words of another, "an unnecessary complication".

This view has, to put it mildly, been strengthened by the attitude of potential applicants for rail franchises, who maintain that they will only go ahead if there is "vertical integration" — ie if they own their track and signalling — which cuts the ground from under the feet of Railtrack.

Vacillation by that eminent source of expensive advice, Coopers Lybrand, does not help. (Coopers has no difficulty in being on two or more sides at the same time. While it acts as BR's main consultant, its director "Sir" Christopher Foster keeps up the spirits of John "Brunel" MacGregor, for an appropriate fee, as his privatisation adviser.)

After months of extremely lucrative work, Coopers has still to produce recommendations for the charging system under which Railtrack will operate. The delay is ominous enough to suggest that Railtrack might be stillborn. Robert Gillette certainly isn't banking on its survival. To breathe life into it, he has moved out of BR (where he is still deputy chairman), and appointed a kindred spirit, John-the-strop Edmonds, least loved of BR bigwigs, as his sidekick.

Gillette is also busy negotiating a salary for himself about £50,000 a year higher than BR chairman, Sir Robert Reid's, who is paid £225,000 (Reid's predecessor, the other Reid, who was seriously interested in railways, was on £90,000.) Horton's £275,000 from Railtrack would be a pittance compared with BP, but it should be worth another £500,000 in redundancy money if Railtrack is merged, as it logically should be, with BR.

Nor does Horton have to worry about the effect of Major's new "meritocratic" policy on his K, which is in the bag. It was offered to him when he took the job in December, and will be announced in June.

'Backbiter'

Correction

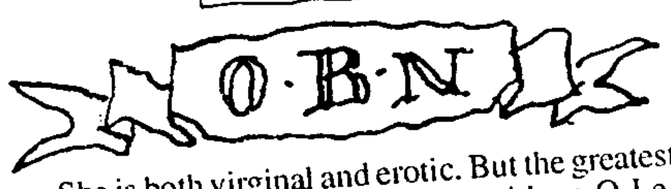
IN OUR Christmas issue we said that Roy Faiers, the editor and publisher of *This England* magazine, had provided financial backing for the Revolutionary Conservative Caucus. We now accept that this is untrue, and that Mr Faiers and his magazine support neither that organisation nor its extremist policies. We apologise for any embarrassment our report will have caused.

Grovel

TO BILL and Biddy Cash's soiree for anti-Maastricht cavaliers at Alistair Macalpine's Westminster house, where I encounter the former Leaderene on the staircase. She is bristling with indignation at the violence on our screens, the poison pouring into our living-rooms, and praises *The Sunday Times* for serialising Michael Medved's polemical book *Hollywood v. America* (published by Murdoch's Harper Collins). I feel obliged to put her right on a few points. Drawing attention to the fact that Medved's *bete noire* is the Arnold Schwarzenneger kill-fest *Terminator 2*, I suggest it is a little ironic that in the same week that *The Sunday Times* published an account of its own sponsored debate about Medved's book, BSkyB's Movies Plus channel should have shown *Terminator 2* among other violent flicks like *New Jack City*, *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *The Evil Dead*, and two in the *Friday the 13th* series.

I could have gone on and said that it is the loopholes in her very own Broadcasting Act which mean that Murdoch is not bound by the same restrictions as terrestrial broadcasters, but there are limits even to this correspondent's bravery.

Mrs Thatcher paused, then smiled. "We'll have to get on to Rupert about that," she said. "He's not like that, you know. He takes his children on camping holidays." I didn't have the heart to tell her that Murdoch's offspring are, like her own, beyond the age of going on camping trips with their father.



She is both virginal and erotic. But the greatest mystery is this: how did a woman with no O-Levels and a disastrous marriage behind her become THE icon figure of our times?

CAMILLE PAGLIA
(on Princess Diana)
Daily Mail

Submitted by W. Grainger

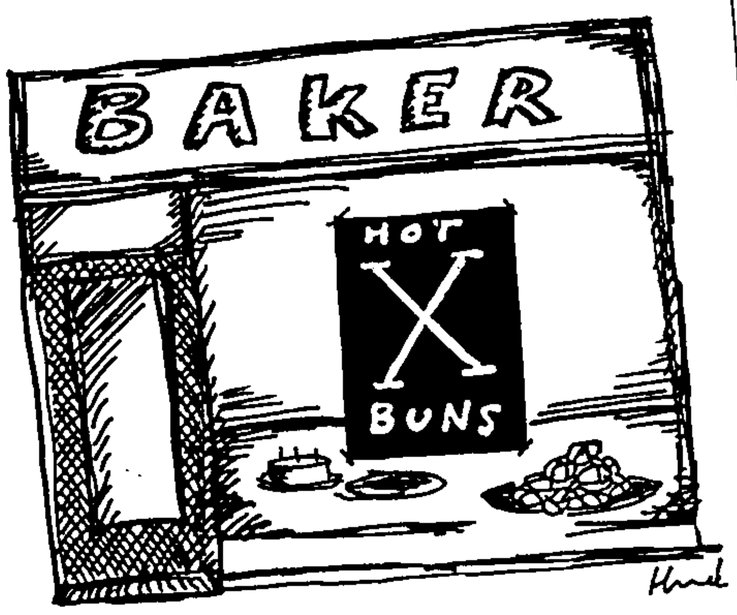
£10 paid for all entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

● *I HEAR of an embarrassing incident at the Groucho Club, Soho's haven for the unspeakable.*

A dustjacket from Jay Landesman's narcolepsy-inducing memoirs Jaywalking had been pinned to the downstairs noticeboard between the gents and the ladies. On St Patrick's day an irresponsible club member decided to purge the noticeboard of this item by starting a small conflagration. Landesman was at first convinced that the culprit was Jeffrey Bernard, but he discovered that "the bastard's got an alibi — he's in hospital having a hip replaced".

I UNDERSTAND that David Mellor is enjoying a new career as a humorous after-dinner speaker.

Recently he performed this function at the Bose UK dealer conference at the Heathrow Penta. From what I hear the former Heritage Secretary needs to liven up his repertoire of jokes. First there was the one about the man who goes to his doctor and asks him if he can catch this AIDS thing from the toilet seat. "Only if you sit down before the last bloke's got up." Then there was the one about a lawyer calling as a witness a Nigerian gentleman, who declines to confirm that his name is Mr Oomwallah Omabunga Frix. Eventually, the lawyer discovers that Frix is the abbreviation of FRICS — or Fellow of the Royal Institue of Chartered Surveyors. Very drole, though I am sure Mr Mellor is more courteous towards his Muslim constituents and Arabs bearing freebies.



TO BANGOR, County Down, where David Montgomery, its prodigal son, has returned to deliver a bizarre sermon on matters of the flesh to the congregation of the Hamilton Road Presbyterian church.

Curiously for a man who now runs a "pro-Labour" newspaper group, Monty appears to have been most deeply affected by an encounter with the Blessed Margaret.

"We were standing in the drawing room at Downing Street and beneath us was a beautiful Persian carpet," he reveals. The discussion turned to Thatcher's *jihad*, the Falklands, and Rommel continues exitedly: "She outlined the whole incident with her toe on the designs of the rug. There was a whole room full of men standing around with their mouths hanging open. She obviously believed her legs are her best feature."

I sense that behind the dour facade of a straitlaced Presbyterian lurks a man with a keen sense of feet.

I WONDER AT the *The Sunday Torygraph*'s decision to change its policy towards the Duchess of York after the recent *Harpers & Queen* revelations. Back in 1991 the *Daily Torygraph*'s books editor, John Coldstream, was ordered by Torygraph Group proprietor Conrad Black to give a sufficiently brown-nosing review to a book by Fergie, who turned up to Annabel's to celebrate Conrad's wedding to pneumatic hackette Barbara Amiel.

Now a leader in *The Sunday Torygraph* has declared that it is no longer possible to defend the conduct of the Duchess ("resentful, confused and inclined to play the little-girl-lost") and her financial adviser ("rapacious and foul-mouthed"). "It is just not worth the effort... the Duchess is simply the most ludicrous member of the royal family this century."

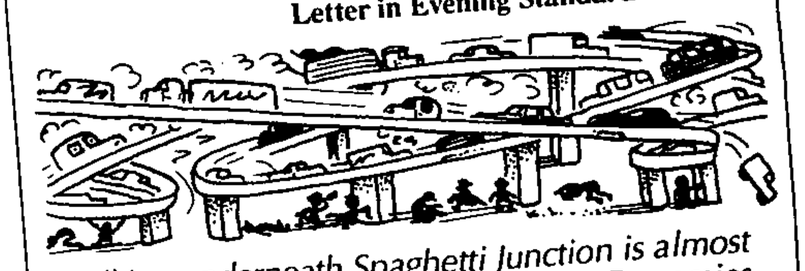
I presume this change of tack has Black's approval; otherwise *Sunday Torygraph* editor Charles Moore can expect a stiff memo from his boss.

Pip Pip!

Pseuds Corner

With reference to Mitchell Symons's One Minute Guide to Rolf Harris, the Stairway to Heaven lyric that no one can explain was misprinted. It should have read: If there's a bustle in your hedgerow,/Don't be alarmed now./It's just a spring clean for the May Queen. The lines refer to the advent of puberty and menstruation of the song's subject, the lady who is buying a stairway to heaven — the attainment of sexual maturity.

ROBERT HIBBERT
Letter in Evening Standard



Walking underneath Spaghetti Junction is almost spiritual, there's a real sense of peace. Brummies in their tens of thousands will come to it and enjoy an enormously challenging experience.

ANTHONY SERGEANT
Guardian

Ricoeur focuses on a major theme of contemporary philosophy: the concept of personal identity. Ricoeur's primary aim is to develop a hermeneutics of the self that will chart its epistemological path and ontological status. A second philosophical concern is to differentiate two meanings of identity that will give rise to a dialectic of selfhood and sameness.

Advert for 'Oneself as Another'
by Paul Ricoeur

It is always exciting to see history being recreated for posterity, whether it is in the form of a museum, an art gallery, or garden restored to former beauty. Karl von Habsburg and Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza have asked me to help them recreate an Imperial Cellar worthy of the occasion.

They have had the clever idea of sharing this enterprise with their friends and to have a wine wedding list from which people can choose wines to be included in the new collection.

Every bottle donated will have a label placed on the back bearing the donor's name so that in years to come, when the wine is drunk, Francesca and Karl will not only enjoy the wine, but also the memory of the person who gave it to them.

Official wedding present list for the forthcoming marriage of Archduke Karl von Habsburg and Baroness Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza

I remember she'd go to parties and say nothing and be completely passive and everyone would just stand and stare at her as if at an incredible object. I was concerned that people, including Nigella, might underestimate her considerable intellect.

DOMINIC LAWSON
(on his sister Nigella)
Sunday Times

Since last April, Sting's been conceiving and recording his music in the chapel-like vaulted dining room of his Tudor country home in Wiltshire (once owned by a noble in the army of King Charles I).

A visit there last summer found the bass-playing laird laboring over the final touches of the first single from "Ten Summoner's Tales", the gliding, gorgeously sung "If I Ever Lose My Faith In You". As a pale pastoral sun spilled in through the stained glass windows, co-producer Hugh Padgham and Sting stood at a portable sound board and tinkered with the track's imposing knell, bringing a chapel-like warmth to the cathedral-sized sound.

TIMOTHY WHITE
Billboard

CONTRIBUTORS: John Kinley, Mike Scott, P. Haigh, S. Molnar, Ben Nevis, David Stark.

£10 paid for entries

NOOKS and CORNERS

WEEP NO TEARS for Sir Norman Foster: his cancellation fees will still be huge.

The announcement about the route of the Channel tunnel rail link confirms what any Londoner with a modicum of commonsense has known for some time: that British Rail's absurdly ambitious project for a subterranean international terminal below King's Cross station is dead.

This also means that the related development scheme for the King's Cross railway lands to the north is also history, as has been clear for some time owing to the "cash-flow difficulties" experienced by members of the London Regeneration Consortium (*Eyes passim*).

This means, for the moment, that all the historic structures once threatened by these plans — the Great Northern Hotel, Keystone Crescent, Stanley Buildings, the Coal Drops and Railway Offices, as well as lots of ordinary, decent, serviceable buildings around King's Cross — are safe. But why were they ever threatened?

The idea of underpinning King's Cross and constructing a new terminal beneath it was always fraught, hugely expensive and — ever since BR abandoned the lunatic idea of driving a tunnel right under London from Kent — completely pointless. It was also always clear to anyone not starry-eyed about Sir Norman that his plan to create an arbitrary oval park surrounded by commercial buildings was alien to the site and quite unnecessarily destructive of the remarkable industrial buildings north of the Regent Canal.

But the scandal is why it has taken more than five years of planning blight to appreciate these obvious truths: *huge* amounts of money and effort have been expended in planning battles. It emerged back in 1987 that BR had ambitions for King's Cross, and the following year Foster Associates so curiously emerged as the favourite "master planners" for the whole area. Sir Norman then enjoyed himself proposing various megalomaniac structures for the international terminal between King's Cross and St Pancras stations, while BR promoted its private bill, involving a huge amount of parliamentary committee time because of the great numbers of petitioners against the plans. All hugely expensive (of public money) and, as we now know, utterly in vain.

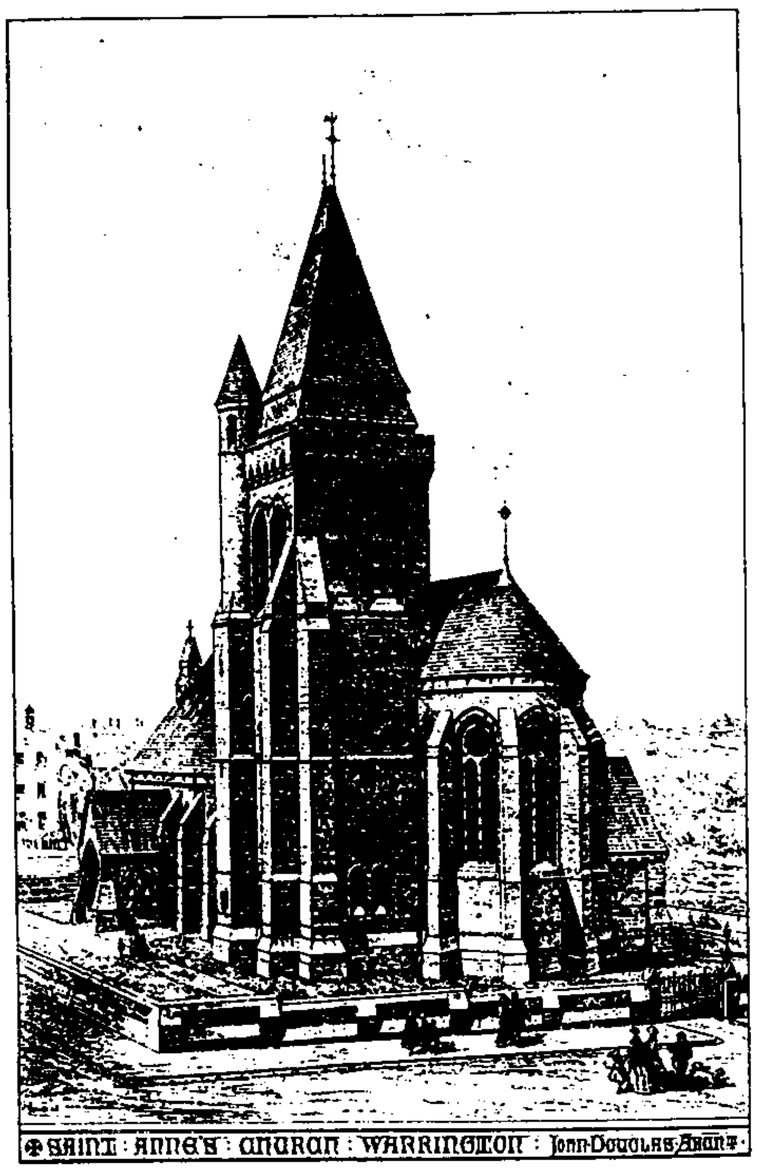
So what next? Now that the line from the Channel is to arrive at Stratford (the best route but, naturally, not the one BR had pushed for), the great brains that run our sad, demoralised national railway have at last noticed that it is practicable (and cheap) to bring the trains along the North London line and so into the magnificent and underused Victorian train shed at St Pancras. As continental trains are very long, this will involve widening the viaduct and track north of the station, but it *can* be done...

But why? I hate to criticise poor BR as it is so crushed by the years of persecution waged by our malevolent and corrupt, car-worshipping government, which is now close to realising its long-term plan of destroying the railway system: but why don't these dim managers and engineers ever *think* before announcing yet more new plans?

The huge trains will create a great deal of noise and vibration and so annoy the good people of Islington along the route, while widening the St Pancras approach will be difficult. More to the point, if the trains are going on to, say, Manchester, they will have to reverse out again from St Pancras, so negating the logic of an interchange station.

There is an answer, and it has been proposed by consulting engineers Alan Baxter Associates. They point out that the railway can be brought to King's Cross from Stratford in a tunnel under the Regent Canal to a new station created in the derelict land to the north of the Victorian termini. This will allow easy connections with the main lines north and west, and easy interchange with the underground and other public transport. It could also be the focus of a rational and pragmatic development of the railway lands site — with none of the arbitrary pretensions of masterplans by Sir Norman Foster.

But why do independent engineers have to point out these truths — at their own expense? Because BR is too proud, or too stupid, ever to admit it is wrong. Weep, dear reader, that the successors to the great men who invented the railway, that inestimable boon to mankind, cannot be trusted either with historic buildings or the building of new lines and stations.



LAST ISSUE I attacked the iconoclasm of the Roman Catholic authorities in Liverpool. In an ecumenical gesture, I now turn my attention to the Anglicans.

My picture shows St Anne's, Warrington, a church of 1868-69 designed by the Chester architect John Douglas. His biographer, the late Ted Hubbard, described it as "quite startlingly bold and original... a prodigy church..." However, the vicar, the Rev Steve Parish, does not care for it. The building is now surplus to requirements due to the reduced size of his congregation; and he now wants to build a cheap new "worship centre" elsewhere in the parish. He has jokily raised £25 for this from another parish in the Liverpool Diocese by promising not to come and preach.

Perhaps he would raise more money by promising not to ruin St Anne's.

'Piloti'

POLICE FIVE

MORE ABOUT John Perkins, the late detective constable in the West Midlands serious crimes squad who took down a "confession" to the Carl Bridgewater murder from Pat Molloy.

As soon as he was allowed to see his lawyer, Molloy complained that Perkins had beaten the confession out of him in the most brutal fashion. Molloy was later convicted (and has since died in prison), but three other men named in his confession, and quite innocent of the murder, are still locked up for it.

In his statement turning down another batch of new evidence last month (and refusing to refer the case again to the court of appeal) home secretary Kenneth Clarke said there was no reason to assume that if Perkins was guilty of fabricating confessions in 1984 (as he was) he had fabricated a confession in 1978.

Mr Clarke might like to read this extract from the statement of a black defendant, Glen Lewis, arrested in 1987 for a robbery he did not do. "On the way to Wednesfield police station I was verbally and physically abused by DC John Perkins. At one point I asked him yet again what I was under arrest for. This time he replied: 'How about robbery, you black enamelled bastard?'. I replied to his absurd suggestion: 'I don't know what you're on about, mate'. He replied: 'I ain't your fucking mate' and headbutted me.

"When we arrived at Wednesfield... John Perkins drew his finger across my neck and said: 'You shoot your fucking mouth off in there and you've had it'... I was at a table with Perkins to the left. John Perkins took several blank statement sheets from a drawer and told me to sign them. This I refused to do. He punched me on the back of the head. I still would not sign the blank sheets. Another officer pulled out a syringe needle and a phial with a clear liquid in it. He said 'This'll make the black bastard talk'. When I realised this was meant for me, I signed the sheets."

Lewis was convicted on the sole basis of the "confession" which Perkins duly typed on to the sheets he had signed. He spent six years in prison and has only recently been released after the court of appeal ordered a re-trial.

No doubt Mr Clarke will say that if Perkins had plainly fabricated confessions he bullied out of suspects in 1984 and 1987, he need not have done the same in 1978. That argument is wearing very thin and the *Eye* is anxious to hear more about this racist and corrupt police officer whom Mr Clarke so rigorously defends.

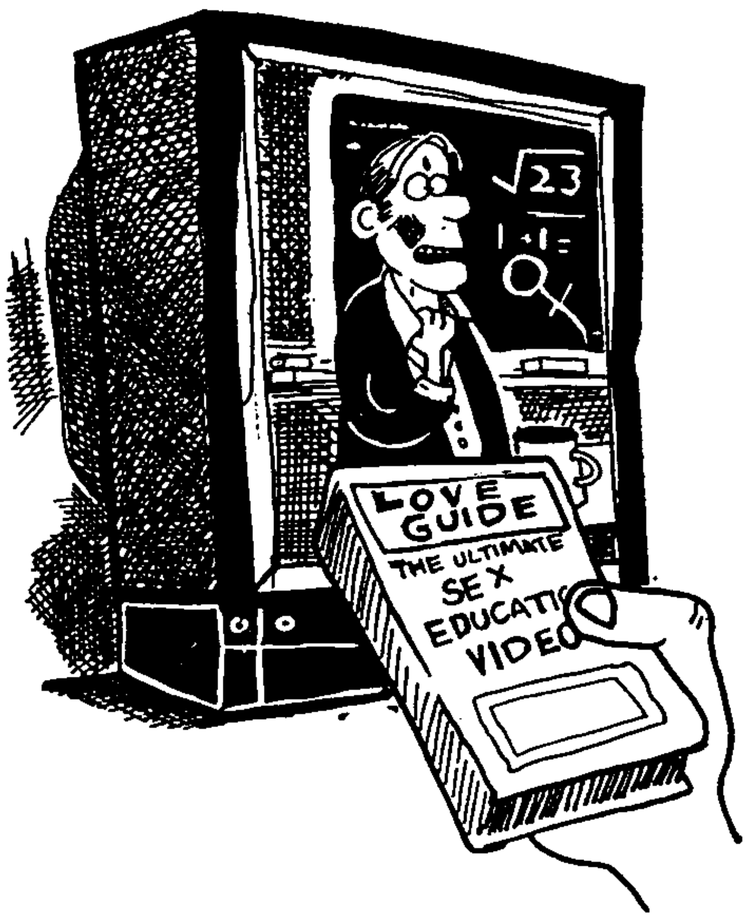
WEST MIDLANDS serious crime squad may be disbanded, but its victims live on.

The latest to emerge from 11 years' incarceration is Keith Twitchell, who once confessed to armed robbery and the murder of a Handsworth shopkeeper.

Strangely, his release came quietly and on the orders of home secretary Kenneth Clarke — just days before Mr Twitchell's case was due to be sent for appeal.

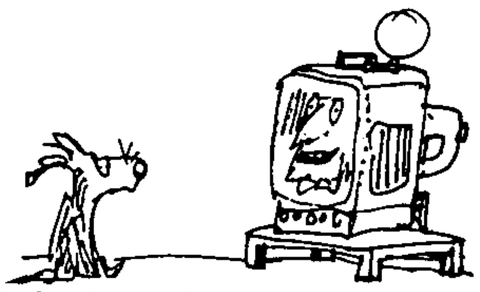
Mr Clarke's decision meant that Mr Twitchell did not have to go into the witness box... and describe how officers beat him and twice put a plastic bag over his head to make him black out while prompting his confession.

Britain's worst police force and the discredited justice system were thus spared another public humiliation. What a fortunate coincidence.



"Well, Tina, that's a very good question"

MEDIA NEWS



IF ANYONE needs further evidence that Marmaduke Hussey is the wrong sort to be running the BBC, it emerged in the wake of his recent trip to Hong Kong.

The BBC's World Service has a hard-won reputation for sterling impartiality and an indisposition to kow-tow to dictatorial regimes, or to tailor its output to commercial pressures.

Towards the end of last year World Service Television began carrying a promotional sequence of footage from the BBC's greatest hours. This includes a segment of footage from Tiananmen Square in 1989.

While in Hong Kong, Hussey was dined by the Li family, who own Hutchvision and Star TV, whose satellite footprint extends from Bahrain to Japan. The BBC has a co-sponsorship deal with Hutchvision for World Service Television, but the trouble is that the Tiananmen Square footage can be picked up by satellites in the People's Republic. Hussey was told that it might assist relations with China if this footage were excised from the sequence and on his return to the BBC the message came down from above that a little judicious re-editing might be in order. The freelance production company that provided the footage, however, has refused to play ball.

THE weekend before the BBC governors met to decide the future of Messrs Birt and Hussey, the *Sunday Times* ran a long and sympathetic feature about the beleaguered pair.

It omitted to mention several points. One was that *Sunset Times* editor Andrew Neill had lunched with Tim Bell, the BBC's PR lobbyist, three days earlier. Another was that in the past year, at the behest of Birt and Hussey, relations between the BBC and Rupert Murdoch's empire have become unusually cosy — the joint deal with BSkyB over Premier League football, for instance, and the unprecedented arrangement which allows Birt's friend David Frost to have his BBC programme transmitted on BSkyB. Before he went to run the BBC, Hussey was employed by Murdoch as a consultant to Times Newspapers; when Hussey was attacked by Michael Grade last year, the newspaper in which he chose to reply was the *Sunday Times*. Still, no doubt all these factors are entirely unrelated to the *Sunset Times's* rose-tinted portrayal of the Beeb's dynamic duo.

THE PAPERS WERE full of hacks defending Birt, and not only the ones he pays vast salaries at the BBC. Rees-Mogg, Birt's patron and Hussey's crony was first, but many others rushed in all peddling the same line viz: the Tax-thing isn't important, it's all just resentment at Birt's new free-market efficiency drive (er...£80 million lost in system... Producer "choice"... Rolling News... Liz Forgan's Golden Handshake... etc, etc, etc).

Even Nigella Lawson, the *Evening Standard*'s own Glenda Slagg, got round to the subject. She wrote that the criticism of John Birt "turns the stomach. The crunch of colliding grievances, festering resentment and plain good, old-fashioned, down-home envy is sickening... I do not need further to state my position: that Bart should stay is axiomatic".

She forgot to mention that Birt is a friend of hers, and was a guest at her wedding reception last year.

HUSSEY'S knowledge of television has never appeared encyclopaedic. But one incident seems to suggest that he knows even less about the medium that one suspected.

Summoned to fit an entry phone to the South Ken flat he shares with his wife Lady Susan, a former lady-in-waiting to the queen, a workman was surprised to be asked if he would also tune in a spanking new television set and video. These had been supplied by the BBC, which earlier this month withdrew the same home viewing perk from producers and senior producers.

"The Duke hates television," confided Lady Hussey in conspiratorial tones. "So I try and watch when he's out."

EYE TV

Eldorado (BBC1)

EastEnders (BBC1)

THE ATTENTION focused on Birtgate/Armanigate has distracted attention from two other interesting pieces of BBC management, which might be called — after the strange modern fashion for naming all public occurrences after outside doors — as Spanishgate and Shellgate. As the first two tests of Alan Yentob's new stewardship of BBC1, they deserve further dissection.

Spanishgate is the axing, in July, of *Eldorado*, the BBC thrice-weekly serial. In cancelling the show — which attracts around seven million viewers, about half the number expected of a top-rating soap — Yentob has done the obvious, and expected, thing. *Eldorado* goes into oblivion, to reemerge briefly in the next century as a neat irony for a cultural and political historian of the 90s — confidently billed as Britain's first Euro-soap. *Eldorado* unfortunately coincided with British second thoughts about European unity — or as a cult item in a future *TV Hell* night.

And yet. And yet. Square Eyes increasingly feels Yentob may come to regret this execution. Firstly, *Eldorado* has doubled its audience since its post-launch ratings low, and has attracted if not a groundswell, then a groundpimple of critical and public perception that it is improving. Secondly, it can be argued that a serious contributor to *Eldorado*'s failure was its scheduling: on nights (Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays) already top heavy with soap opera, in the form of *Brookside* and *Coronation Street*. There would have been a case for cutting the show down from three slabs a week to two and trying it in less crammed parts of the schedules.

Thirdly, by killing the sickly soap, Yentob has set himself the big public test — with the tabloid press in vulturish attendance — of coming up with a more successful replacement. Failure to do so would at once create an air of crisis around his BBC1 reign. Reducing the number of episodes and nursing *Eldorado* through the summer — when the sporting calendar allows a certain amount of postponing and juggling of weak shows — would have given the new controller time for some successes before unveiling the successor.

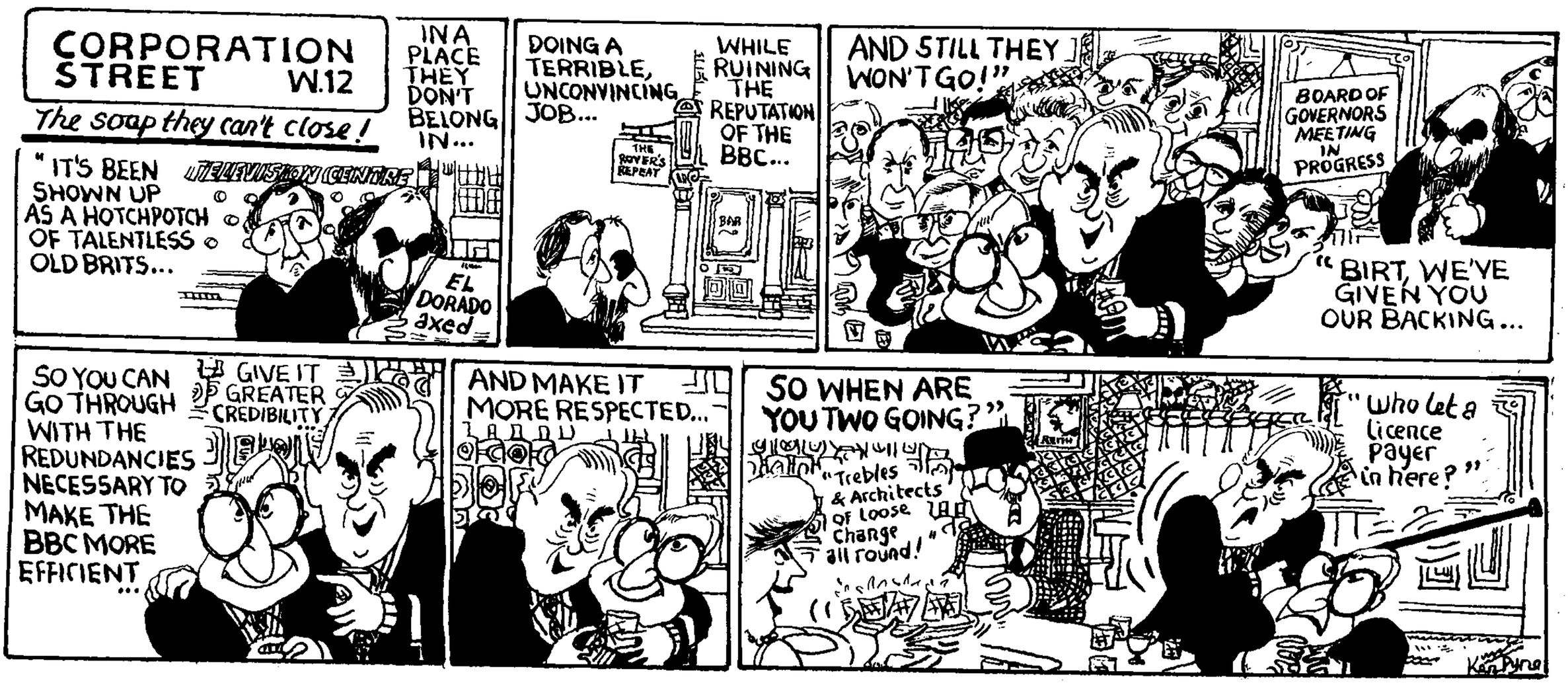
Square Eyes's advice to him is to abandon the search for a Monday-Wednesday-Friday ratings triple whammy — *Wogan* and *EastEnders* having both now failed in this format — and try to kickstart each evening's schedules with individual shows, perhaps moving *A Question Of Sport* or one of the healthier sitcoms to 7pm slots.

But Yentob's other early decisions at BBC1 suggests that he is having some difficulty adjusting to the mainstream channel. An innovator and risk-taker at 2, he seems, at 1, keen to build up quick credit with the Whitehouse set. Following his craven behaviour over the final episode of *Casualty*, Yentob recently decided to unravel the cliffhangers in *EastEnders* by giving away the outcome at the beginning of each episode. This was because the storyline — the kidnapping of Shell's kid by the late Dirty Den — inadvertently, and slightly, resembled the case of James Bulger of Liverpool. Hence, a continuity announcement advised viewers that the missing Vicky would turn up safe.

Appearing socially responsible, this Shellgate decision is in fact silly and illogical. The drink-driving-death storyline in *EastEnders*, for example, was not attended by an apology to those relatives who had died on the roads. The cliffhanger in *Eldorado* of whether or not Drew was dead after falling to the floor clutching his chest elicited no reassurance to cardiac victims and their families at the start of the next episode.

What links Botney's first two BBC1 tests, apart from that they both involve soap operas, is that he took in each case what may appear the safest option (cancelling *Eldorado*, apologising for *EastEnders*), but which may turn out to have been dangerous: the first by leaving a treacherous hole, the second by giving yet one more tacit acknowledgment of television's social guilt. Could do better.

'Square Eyes'


CORPORATION STREET W.12
The soap they can't close!
IN A PLACE THEY DON'T BELONG IN...
"IT'S BEEN SHOWN UP AS A HOTCHPOTCH OF TALENTLESS OLD BRITS...
TELEVISION CENTRE
EL DORADO axed
DOING A TERRIBLE, UNCONVINCING JOB...
WHILE RUINING THE REPUTATION OF THE BBC...
THE ROVER'S RETURN
BAR
AND STILL THEY WON'T GO!"
BOARD OF GOVERNORS MEETING IN PROGRESS
"BIRT, WE'VE GIVEN YOU OUR BACKING...
SO YOU CAN GO THROUGH WITH THE REDUNDANCIES NECESSARY TO MAKE THE BBC MORE EFFICIENT...
GIVE IT GREATER CREDIBILITY...
AND MAKE IT MORE RESPECTED...
SO WHEN ARE YOU TWO GOING?"
"Trebles & Architects of loose change all round!"
"Who let a licence payer in here?"
Ken Pyne

I moved quickly to join the BBC's staff because I did not want anyone — least of all those working within the Corporation — to think that my commitment and dedication to the BBC were less than total, which they are.

Yours sincerely,
JOHN BIRT,
Director-General,
British Broadcasting Corporation,
Broadcasting House,
Portland Place, W1.
March 8.

The Times

WHILE BBC governors have demonstrated the ineffectiveness of regulation in the public broadcasting sector, the Independent Television Commission (ITC) has been matching them gaffe for gaffe on ITV.

On the commercial network the new franchisees have been busy breaking all the glossy programme and quality promises that won them their pots of gold last year.

At Granada, for example, extended press coverage of Stalinist purges and ruthless cost-cutting, detailed in a dossier sent to the ITC by Anne Clwyd, Labour's heritage spokesperson, finally goaded the ITC's chief executive David Glencross into action last month. Despite newspaper reports of a "grilling", insiders say the new catering managers and advertising executives who have installed themselves in David Plowright's former empire escaped with barely a slap on the wrist.

"Meetings with the ITC are one area in which investment in hordes of public relations consultants at the cost of programme makers pays off," observed one of the few Granada journalists left last week.

In the past few weeks Tyne Tees, the once proud north-east company, has virtually disappeared from under the ITC's nose as its "partner", Yorkshire Television, has begun closing down its former neighbour's Newcastle studios. The ITC has adopted a not unfamiliar tactic, saying it will wait and see "if there is any change in programme quality" before acting, even though the closures seem a blatant violation of the ITV licence application and specific undertakings given by the two companies on their merger last year.

Meanwhile Westcountry Television marks perhaps the ITV's most flagrant failure to regulate. Westcountry started off in the early hours of 1 January as it has gone on since — with a technical breakdown. Eddie Murphy was on air just 17 minutes in *Best Defence* before the announcer was apologising for blank screens and a transmitter failure.

Since then the ITC has received hundreds of letters from Devon, Cornwall and Somerset complaining about Westcountry Live, WC's 60-minute regional news flagship. A poll of 4,500 viewers by the *Western Morning News*, the leading regional newspaper, found that 88.7 per cent of viewers were unhappy with their new regional channel. Ironic, since Westcountry won the franchise from Television South West (TSW) by playing on what it termed "quite wide dissatisfaction with the current news services".

Aside from programme quality, Westcountry has failed to deliver the one innovation many believe ultimately won it the franchise: its pledge to develop seven regional television bureaux in towns throughout the region. Westcountry — now universally known as WC TV — says it has cashflow problems as a result of TSW's efforts to fight the award of the franchise in the courts.

Locals wonder how long it can be before the Britanny-based French broadcaster FR3 adds to the growing list of French takeovers of British utilities by bailing Westcountry out. The ITC, meanwhile, has been as active as ever. It has written to the Plymouth-based company expressing its "concern".

LUVVIES

"Hilary, my agent, is being just a gem. She has been running around after me taking on all the stress and worry of the first-night presents off my shoulders. We decided to get key-rings..."

RUTHIE HENSHALL
Evening Standard

"Emma [Thompson] is the only person I have ever met who has a well-defined sense of her own destiny. She has this cat-like ability to walk into a room and belong and not seem uncomfortable. I suspect she will be the same at the Oscar ceremony. It will be: "This is my right, I belong here."

ROBERT BATHURST (an actor)
Daily Mail

Submitted by Richard Witts, Ena B. Pitman.

An occasional column featuring gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

WITH THE sun about to set on *Eldorado* (see Square Eyes), surely it's time for Alan Yentob to turn his attention to another costly flop inherited from Jonathan Powell, *Entertainment Express*.

The boring Friday evening show attracts only marginally more viewers than the cancelled Spanish soap, despite being anchored by the hugely expensive Selina Scott (as seen on BSkyB). While at first glance merely a pale imitation of the American *Entertainment Tonight* (as seen on Sky), the BBC programme also bares surprising similarities to a cheapo late night programme over on ITV.

Hollywood Report, a dull weekly film, music and "lifestyle" show is presented from, strangely enough, London by the irredeemably irritating Richard Jobson, with unaffected hackette Katie Wagner providing reports from America. One such feature included an interview with medium league British bimbo Patsy Kensit, recorded on the set of her latest artistic fuck 'em and shoot 'em movie.

On the ITV programme, Kensit was shown discussing her art with Wagner. Funnily enough, the exact same interview later popped up on BBC's *Entertainment Express*, with Wagner edited out of the tape, and her questions voiced over by a BBC hack.

This interesting, and by no means unprecedented, technique has been developed by World Wide Entertainment News, a syndicated gossip service based in London. WWEN produces *Hollywood Report* for Central, which in turn sells the show to the ITV network.

WWEN is also credited as "programme associate" on the BBC show. By no means an example of the "distinctive" approach to programming advocated by John Birt, the fact that *Entertainment Express* uses so much material from WWEN, as well as "electronic press kits" (ie video press puffs) supplied by film companies, does raise some interesting questions. Why does the programme require such a large BBC production team; does it really need a second anchor and three reporters; and couldn't Selina Scott be replaced by the less pricy Wagner?

I-BSkyB

Showing films either side of the news is irritating enough. But why censor those screened after the watershed?

Martial arts movies are always cut. They even got at Indiana Jones.

Thank heavens for Sky Movies.

GARRY BUSHELL
The Sun

Diana R. Kearns.

An occasional column for which readers are invited to submit Sky-plugs masquerading as news items in Murdoch papers. The usual £10 will be paid.

THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS BROTHERS

THOSE in charge of Manchester's "ethnic" radio station, Sunset, continue to use more imagination in disguising the station's chaotic finances than they have in boosting its chances of success.

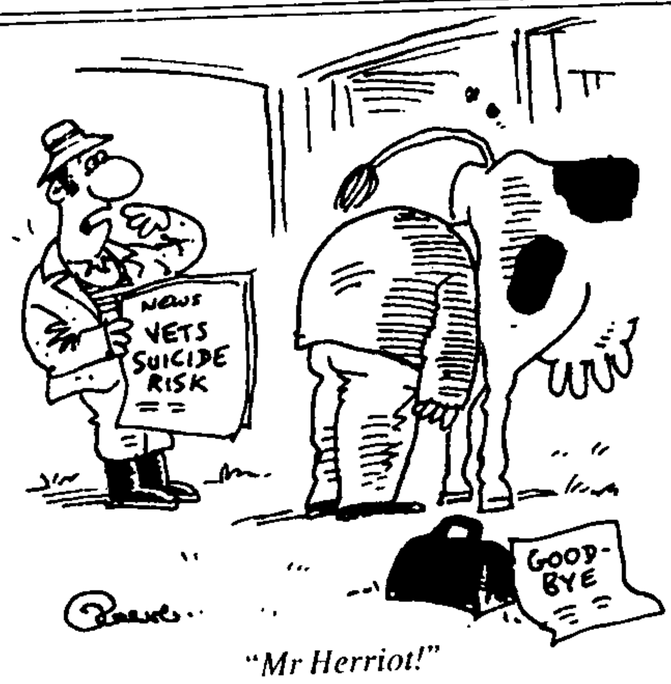
The latest wheeze involves creating fictitious shareholders to ward off the Inland Revenue, which is chasing a £130,000 tax bill. Although Sunset proprietor Hassan Al-Jaizani assured the taxman that a Hong Kong businessman would be investing £260,000 in the station, and won a further stay of execution, the Asiatic investor turned out not to exist. The Inland Revenue is now re-issuing winding-up orders for the troubled station.

Meanwhile, the radio licensing authority, which has been meeting to consider revoking the station's licence on the grounds that there has been widespread deception over the shareholding, was surprised to be told by Al-Jaizani that shares held under the name "Thair Ali" are owned by Qatar-based businessman Hassan Ali Bin Ali.

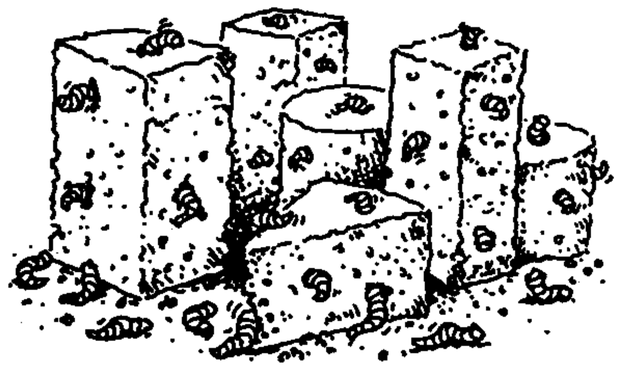
A call to Bin Ali in Qatar was little help. The latter claims no knowledge of any such arrangement and is unsure whether he has any involvement with Sunset.

AS WE revealed in the last *Eye*, ITV's new Teletext company — owned by Lord Rothermere — took its sleazy "adult" service *After Hours* off the air following a warning from the Independent Television Commission that it was "unsuitable".

Teletext, however, has a more ingenious explanation for the decision. In a letter to a viewer who wrote to inquire about *After Hours*, Teletext's editor, John Holmes, writes: "You may have noticed that the Couples dating service is temporarily suspended. This is to allow us to expand it because of its success..."



"Mr Herriot!"



ROTTEN BOROUGHS

MURKEYSIDE

DEREK HATTON'S first cinema role was a non-speaking part in a biopic about Shostakovich (Equity insisted he kept his gob shut as a condition for allowing him a union card) — but he is unlikely to adopt a silent role in coming weeks.

As Degsy emerges from the shadow cast over his career by Operation Cheetah, he will be able to make up for lost time on the media. The time taken to "relax and recuperate with his family" has already proved shortlived: partying until 4am after his acquittal, he went on Frostie's breakfast programme the very next day. No doubt he has several other chat show engagements lined up courtesy of his media minder Max Clifford.

Justifiably, we can expect Degsy to proclaim his innocence from the rooftops on all of these appearances, denouncing the tremendous waste of public money in bringing him to trial. Estimates as to the cost of prosecuting Derek Hatton and friends range from between £10 and £20 million.

The lack of evidence calls into question the judgement of Det Supt "Buffalo" Bill Coady and the crown prosecution service. The failure of a Welsh jury to find a gang of scousers guilty must be a legal first!

Weeks before the end of the trial it became obvious that the accused would walk free. The shambolic evidence of council officials as witnesses for the prosecution was enough to convince the jury that Hatton & Co had no case to answer.

The fundamental weakness of the prosecution case rendered it unnecessary for the accused to go into the witness box themselves. The jury were thus spared Hatton's eloquent testimony to the effect that: "I never once in all that time offered or suggested any inducement or anything that a client would be prepared to give. I absolutely would not consider it and they would have told me where to go anyway."

Derek Hatton might expect to receive the freedom of the city of Liverpool any day now as compensation for his 3½-year ordeal.

Hatton, however, is not out of the woods yet. The inept Knackers of Murkeyside fraud squad say he may face more charges as a result of the "ongoing" Operation Cheetah operation. A new thick (*sic*) file of further evidence on other land deals was specially delivered to DPP Barbara Mills by squad car, involving a 400-mile round trip between Murkeyside and London.

MANCHESTER

BRITAIN'S olympic council, Manchester, has an odd way of flattering its benefactors.

No sooner had the government given the go-ahead for a new 300-acre shopping city at sewage-infested Dumplington Park, than the Labour-dominated local authority threw its hands up in horror at the potential loss to the city centre Manchester economy.

But who does Manchester think its kidding? Dumplington Park, on the banks of the Manchester Ship Canal, is the brainchild of multi-millionaire, Isle of Man-based John Whittaker, owner of the all-powerful Manchester Ship Canal Company, the fastest-growing firm in northern England.

Whittaker has been battling for government approval for the scheme since 1985 when he took over the then ailing canal company. His first coup was to strike an ingenious deal with the canal company's majority shareholders — Manchester city council. This entailed the council relinquishing its historic control of the canal in exchange for the return of an 80-year-old £7 million debenture loan and a Whittaker/Manchester city council partnership involving a variety of money-spinning ventures in east Manchester (near the would-be olympics site, natch, and around fast-growing Manchester airport).

Just for good measure, the canal company has thrown its ample weight behind the city's much-vaunted olympic bid — Whittaker sits on Manchester's olympic committee — and plans to build a new Metrolink tram route from Dumplington to the city centre.

BIRMINGHAM

YOUNGSTERS at Birmingham's "university" of crime, aka the notorious St John's children's home, continue to graduate from its pioneering car crime department with tragic consequences.

The alumni included — until very recently — a 14-year-old girl, Sally Anne Cattell, who had stolen a fleet of vehicles, one of which she even persuaded police to help her bump start after a crash. When St John's social workers recently let her out on home leave, she killed herself in a high-powered 16-valve Metro. One of the two boys with her had also been let out of the home — despite being remanded by magistrates for a string of very serious offences.

The Cattell case is horribly reminiscent of another, reported exclusively in the *Eye* in February 1990: that of 15-year-old Warren Lewin, who was kicked out of St John's by social workers who were incapable of dealing with him. In theory he was still under their supervision and was supposed to be attending the home's school; but in practice they ignored him in the hope that he would go away. No one was very surprised when he stole two high-powered cars with three friends to have a race and was killed in the resulting crash.

In another case, 16-year-old Rafiq Shaban was kicked out by St John's staff and six weeks later stole a Montego and killed 55-year-old pedestrian Albert Pearson in a police chase.

Not all the best St John's pupils are teenagers. In another case, a 12-year-old, remanded for a £20,000 burglary, was allowed out with two friends and stole a Fiesta XR2, leading Thames Valley police on a high-speed chase before crashing into a police car. The 12-year-old escaped, but one of his friends was taken back to St John's only to escape within hours from under the eyes of vigilant staff.

The list could go on. Stanley Defreitas, another St John's graduate, stole a Vauxhall Astra and ram-raided a Leeds hi-fi shop. Later he stabbed a motorist and stole his car. Adam Luckett had stolen more than 40 cars, many while in the loving care of Birmingham social services. Wayne Martin, Simon Twist and Linzell Taylor all have similar records.

IN BIRMINGHAM, renowned among intellectuals as a centre for the arts, the average citizen likes nothing more than to mix classical music, Shakespeare and ballet with his daily diet of bread and dripping.

Consequently the *Eye* can't understand why the city's Labour leaders have stamped a document detailing the £4.4 million they plan to spend on loss-making arts ventures as "top secret".

The greatest secrecy, however, surrounds reports by the council and the Arts Council on the losses of the city's Rep Theatre. Copies leaked to the *Eye* reveal how it will consume grants of £796,000 from the city and £715,000 from the Arts Council (while the Alexandra Theatre a few hundred yards away survives on just £350,000 in grants).

The Rep's last management team has departed — in secrecy — following a scathing report from the Arts Council. Among other problems, ticket sales were down by 50 per cent, while it had spent millions on a huge extension to attract conference and business users, which proved to be a huge white elephant. Its fate was sealed by a series of bizarre productions, including a massively expensive opera about Steve Biko.

But of course the Rep has a prestige position next to the city's pride, the International Convention Centre, whose losses dwarf the Rep's by about £20 million. It would be a huge blow to shut it down, so money will continue to pour in. It will be a great consolation to voters to know that their money is going to such good causes.

HACKNEY

OFFICIALS in Hackney are apparently so desperate to be seen to be taking action against massive housing fraud in the borough (see *Eyes passim*) that they are prepared to risk proceedings for libel and wasting police time.

The risk arose during a Kafkaesque campaign against Mr Zak Akinpeju, an accountant employed in the borough's finance department, who was recently sacked for alleged gross misconduct. The disciplinary charges against him centred on the financial affairs of his estranged wife, who allegedly did not declare his income in a housing benefit application. No action has ever been taken against Mrs Akinpeju for this alleged "fraud", but Zak was sacked because the council says he should have shopped her.

To get "evidence" against Mr Akinpeju, the head of the audit dept, Robert Barr, obtained a copy of a mortgage application the Akinpejus had made to the Leeds building society. It included the accounts for Crescent Consultancy — an import-export business Mrs Akinpeju had set up in 1990. They had been prepared by an accountant, but — since Crescent was not a limited company — had not been audited.

In his report to Zak Akinpeju's disciplinary hearing, Mr Barr concludes — without any evidence at all — "Crescent Consultancy either does not exist, or if it does exist, the profits used to support the mortgage application have been overstated and a deception has been perpetrated..." The Leeds apparently disagree, for it has taken no action against the couple.

Since the council document named Mrs Akinpeju's accountant as the man who had prepared the accounts, specifically accuses the Akinpejus of making a fraudulent application, and was circulated to third parties (including the police), it seems that a number of people might have good grounds for a libel action against Mr Barr and Hackney council.

Moreover, although Hackney has since admitted that the mortgage "fraud" allegation cannot be substantiated, their legal department gleefully repeats the libellous accusations against Mr Akinpeju, his wife and her accountant in the documents sent to the industrial tribunal which will soon consider his case.

Hackney chief executive Jerry White has belatedly agreed to look into the matter, but strangely the file "cannot be found" at present.

TOWER HAMLETS

ABSURD machinations in Tower Hamlets threaten the future of Britain's most illiberal Liberal authority.

Six months ago QC John Hendy published a damning report into alleged market stall corruption in the borough. At the centre of the row is hapless Liberal councillor Betty Wright, who was accused of trading unlawfully.

Naturally there were vociferous calls from Labour opponents for Wright to be suspended, along with two Liberal colleagues, Jeremy Shaw and John Snooks, both singled out for criticism in the QC's report. The suspension calls were even backed by Liberal leader Peter Hughes, anxious to protect the, er, good name of Tower Hamlets.

Yet remarkably when it came to the vote on the proposed suspension at a full council meeting, Labour, despite months of manic campaigning, voted against!

Surely Labour hasn't decided it would be electorally advantageous to have three discredited councillors squirming before the electorate at next year's council elections rather than seek justice now?

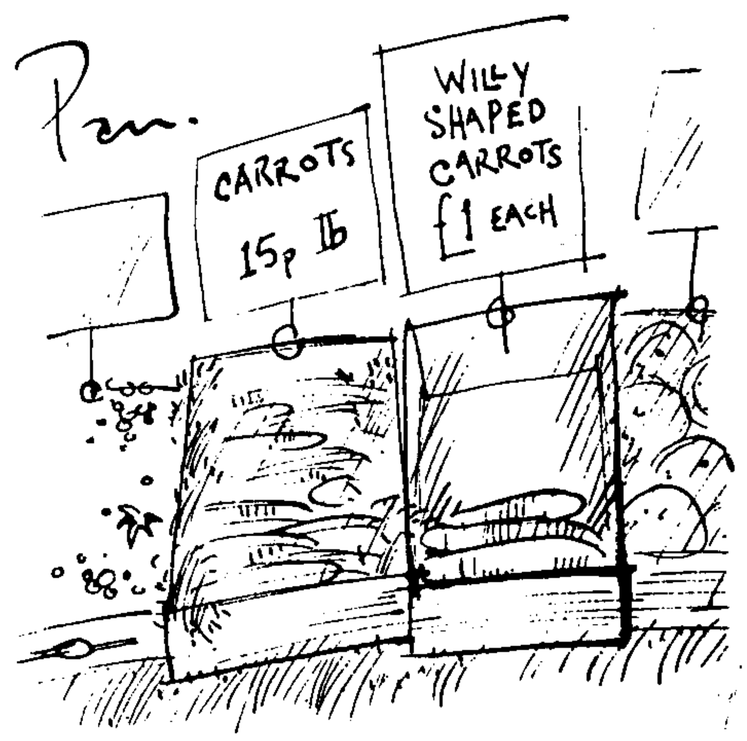
TWYFORD DOWN

JAMES SABBAN-CLARE, headmaster of Winchester College, used to be very proud of the school's Green Society. "There is a great deal more understanding of the need to treat our environment with care and respect than ever there was in our generation," he wrote recently. But it was a different story when members of the society decided to protest against the extension of the M3 through Twyford Down, a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

The contract for gouging the 100-foot deep cutting out of the lovely landscape of the Down has gone, of course, to the government's most favoured construction firm, Tarmac. On March 11 more than a dozen boys from Winchester's Green Society chained their bicycles together to block the road used by dumper trucks. When forced by security guards to dismantle their barricade, the boys invaded the cutting in person, again blocking the route of the trucks. When the police were called the boys protested that they were entitled to be on the land (which belongs to Winchester College) every bit as much as Tarmac, their bully boys or the police. This argument didn't go down well with Hants Constabulary, who hauled two of the boys off for questioning, and held them for two hours. What was the response of Mr Sabban-Clare to this gross abuse of the right of his boys to demonstrate "their understanding of the need to treat the environment with care and respect"? The headmaster placed Twyford Down out of bounds to all boys and wrote a whingeing letter of warning and complaint to the demonstrators' parents. He did not point out in his letter that the land through which the cutting is to pass was originally bought for the college in 1922 by two schoolmasters who laid down that it should be protected for posterity and reserved "for pedestrians and equestrians, not for wheeled traffic". Nor did he disclose that, in spite of this condition, he and the school had flogged off the land to the Department of Transport for £300,000; nor that the new motorway will put out of use the existing Winchester by-pass, thus providing the college with a valuable strip of land stretching from the centre of the city to the new road.

FACT. The security firm employed to harass the protestors at Twyford Down is part of Group Four Securitas (director Sir Norman Fowler, chairman of the Tory Party).

ANOTHER FACT. The Department of Transport has shelled out £7,000 to an obscure private detective agency to photograph the protestors and check on their records. There seems to be no record of any authorisation for such a strange use of public money.



DOWN ON THE FARM

with 'New Muckspreader'

LAST WEEK the chief veterinary officer, Keith Meldrum, was on the front page of the *Times* being reminded of his claim in September 1991 that: "Within the next year, we will see the start of a rapid decline in the number of confirmed BSE cases".

BSE has in fact increased from an average of 675 to 885 cows per week — but there was another reason Mr Meldrum should have been on the front pages. The parliamentary ombudsman has issued two reports describing horrific acts of illegality practised against egg producers. In both, Mr Meldrum's state veterinary service played a starring role.

Story number one began on 27 January 1989, when his vets "raided" an East Yorkshire egg farm and, within minutes, closed it down. So petty and complete was their work that they even prevented bought-in eggs being sold in the farm shop. They would not tell the farmer why his farm was being closed, and it only later came to light that the closure related to a finding of salmonella some eight months earlier.

None of the birds on the farm at that time were present, but this did not trouble the vets. Neither did the fact that the farm had been tested and found clear of salmonella. Nor even that the farmer had been officially thanked for helping the ministry develop a code on salmonella control. Mr Meldrum was not available to take calls and increasingly frantic letters went unanswered.

Meanwhile Meldrum's bully boys wanted to test birds for salmonella. But they were then without powers to require samples. An economical way was found around this problem. The vets simply demanded birds, without payment, on threat of permanent closure.

When traces of salmonella were eventually found in one flock, the infected hen house was closed "indefinitely". When the farmer's solicitor protested to Mr Meldrum that the birds were costing £200 a week, he was told that "this was not the ministry's problem". The farmer was forced to slaughter them, taking a £100,000 loss.

Even as Meldrum's vets were moving into position on this and 33 other farms, however, ministry lawyers were warning that closures, without compensation, could be illegal. Our farmer threatened a judicial review, which ministry lawyers feared would be successful; and only then did MAFF introduce a compensation scheme — just as the last of our farmer's birds was slaughtered. He was refused any payment on the grounds that his slaughter had been "voluntary".

Four long years later, the ombudsman ruled that the slaughter was not voluntary and urged that MAFF should pay compensation. Quite unashamed by its actions, MAFF offered a measly £12,500, or 40 per cent of the notional assessed value of the birds slaughtered. In the dry words of the ombudsman, the MAFF "was invited to reconsider" its payment. Six months later, it made a revised offer of £23,210.

Even this was not the full extent of the story. In another report, the ombudsman found that Mr Meldrum's vets had cheated an additional 122 egg producers out of their rightful compensation. They had illegally withheld 40 per cent of the assessed value of their birds, once again in the face of legal advice that the full amounts should be paid.

To conceal its illegality, MAFF refused to disclose the basis on which compensation was paid. Further, it told claimants that, if they challenged the amounts, all payment would be withheld. Small wonder the ombudsman strongly criticised MAFF and ordered that the farmers should be paid a sum estimated at £1,000,000. What is surprising is that the executor of this disgraceful scheme, Mr K.C. Meldrum, is still in his post, drawing his £49,000 salary.

Old Macdonald

ALBERT

EUROPE SON! THE EXPORT MARKET! THATS WHERE YOU SHOULD BE. THERE'S 350 MILLION PEOPLE OUT THERE AN' THEY HAVEN'T GOT ANYTHING LIKE ENOUGH OF WHAT YOU CAN GIVE 'EM!
I DONT KNOW. ISN'T IT A BIT RISKY?
SELFISH BUGGER!! THERE'S SHORTAGES ALL OVER BLOODY EUROPE AN' YOU'RE IN A UNIQUE POSITION TO MAKE SURE THAT THERES AT LEAST ONE THING THEY GET PLENTY OF!
WHATS THAT GEORGE?
FOWL PEST!

Bankers

LABOUR MP Austin Mitchell is calling for an investigation into the actions of Barclays Bank and accountants Ernst & Young in the controversial liquidation of the J.S. Bass group of companies (see *Eyes* 813 and 814).

The MP for Grimsby has asked both the department of trade and the professional misconduct section of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW) to look into the legality of Barclays' and Ernst & Young's procedures, and into a possible conflict of interest. Ernst & Young, *Eye* readers will recall, was asked to examine the J.S. Bass group's books, as a result of which examination it was appointed liquidator by Barclays — a double whammy that earned it £950,000 in fees from the (now defunct) group's profit of £1.2 million.

Mr Mitchell asks several questions in his letters. Was Companies House misled over a directors' statement of affairs from the group? (Ernst & Young denied ever receiving the statement but had in fact receipted the document six months previously.) Why did draft accounts showing a profit differ so much from the circulated accounts showing a large loss? Who owns the various properties of J.S. Bass now? Were they clients of Barclays and was there any connection between the eventual purchasers and Ernst & Young?

The last question stems from the fact that properties were "liquidated" in 1988 — at the peak of the property market — but at 1980 property valuations. In particular, a property in Adelphi Street, Manchester, was sold for £210,000 when valued at £287,000 in 1988, without being advertised or going through an agent. It was bought by a company called Phoenix Construction, which had not traded for two years and was apparently insolvent. The property lay dormant until June 1991 when it was sold for more than £300,000.

Mr Barry Chapman, the former managing director of the Bass Group, had to sell his home in Manchester and now lives in Wales on income support. In June last year, Ernst & Young made an application for Southern and Darwent, a subsidiary of J.S. Bass, to obtain a bankruptcy order against Mr Chapman for non-payment of £23,896 — which, having been liquidated, he could obviously not pay. The petition for bankruptcy was found to be defective in law, having been incorrectly drawn up, and Neil Myerson, Mr Chapman's solicitors, have this month asked that the petition be withdrawn.

As Neil Myerson wrote to Ernst & Young: "Given that it is a well established principle that bankruptcy proceedings are not a debt collecting process, that no financial benefit could have been achieved by the bankruptcy order and that the joint liquidators owe a duty to the shareholders and creditors, we ask you to explain to us your reasoning behind the application for a bankruptcy order."

Could it be that the thinking behind Ernst & Young's action was to minimise Barry Chapman's potential as a threat, following his treatment at the firm's hands? As Salford university's Professor Christer, one of Mr Chapman's staunchest supporters, has written: "This is a practice that has been observed elsewhere".

Sally Deedes

THE fatuous citizen's charter promises "an apology, an explanation and a swift and effective remedy" to rotten public service, but it is easier said than achieved.

Christine Spencer-Weatherley is suing her local council in Aberconwy for negligence, her right to a citizen's charter-style apology having been vetoed by the council's insurance company, Municipal Mutual.

If a complaint against a public body is anything more than trivial, an apology could amount to an admission of guilt or liability. So insurance companies strangle this right at birth and complainants have to sue through the courts.

Mrs Spencer-Weatherley is a professional carer and foster mother. In 1988 she bought Castel Hall House, a large Victorian mansion in Gwynedd. Two months after moving in, her two daughters fell through the floor, which was subsequently found to be riddled with dry rot. She contacted Aberconwy council, but the environmental officer refused her request for emergency housing or grant aid, and she was forced to spend £40,000 in an attempt to combat the dry rot.

Two years later, in debt and unable to service the high cost of repairs, she remortgaged the house. During a second local authority "search" of the property, she discovered that the house that had been served with a closing order by the council in 1981... because it had extensive dry rot "that would contribute to the instability of the structure".

A year before she had bought the property, another couple had been interested in it but had been given this information by the council and had withdrawn. Mrs Spencer-Weatherly would have liked to have had the same option; added to which, had the closing order come to light at the time of her daughters' accident, the family would have been entitled to emergency housing and grant aid.

A council assistant refused her access to the search document (for which she had already paid) unless she signed a letter promising not to sue the council. A Mrs Kells from the borough surveyor's office told me: "If it is a possibility of professional negligence then the assistant acted correctly in protecting the council's interests." So much for William Waldegrave, the minister for the citizen's charter, and his much-vaunted notion of "public service".

Having sold her house at a loss, and unable to recoup the £40,000 she spent in repairs, Mrs Spencer-Weatherley is now living in rented property and suing the council. According to the council, the case "is proceeding through the normal course of litigation". This means that all normal means of approach to the council have been hijacked by the insurance company, which has reserved the right to answer all Mrs Spencer-Weatherley's letters.

Frustrated, Mrs Spencer-Weatherley wrote to the lord chancellor's office demanding to know her rights under the citizen's charter and received this baffling reply: "As far as the charter is concerned, I would point out that it seeks to establish a series of guidelines within which government departments are expected to work. I do not think it was ever intended to be taken as literally as you seem to think".

Proof, perhaps, that it should be taken with a bucket of salt.

DOING THE ROUNDS

FROM 1 APRIL, no junior doctor should be contracted to be on duty for more than a weekly average of 83 hours, and none should actually work more than 60 hours. So says Virginia Bottomley's much trumpeted "new deal".

Unfortunately many regions are unable to achieve even this pitiful goal. **North West Thames RHA** has admitted that it does not have the resources to implement the deal, while many other regions are altering job contracts on paper, without reducing the workload at all. In effect, junior doctors will be paid less for doing the same amount of work.

In the **Grampian** region, the **Royal Aberdeen Hospital's NHS Trust** has unilaterally altered juniors' contracts to 72 hours a week in the knowledge that many are still working more than 90 hours. In the **West Midlands**, a neuro-surgical registrar is working more than 104 hours a week, and doctors on intensive care units in **Bristol** and **Bath**, and those providing anaesthetic and obstetric services at Bristol's **St Michael's hospital**, are all expected to work dangerous 1 in 2 rotas.

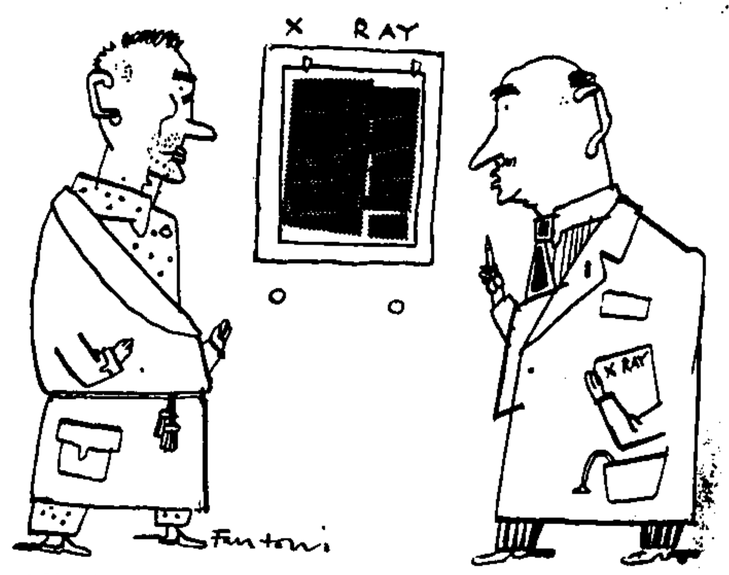
Even where reductions in hours have been achieved, the result has been a huge increase in the intensity of work. Most house officers in the **south-west** get a maximum of 2.1 hours' uninterrupted sleep while on call, and many still work more than 83 hours. Hardly something to write home about.

● **LONDON** is not the only city facing massive (ie 2,500) acute bed closures. **Glasgow** is set to lose 1,200; 750 are due to go in **Belfast**; 600 in **Birmingham**; 500 in **south Manchester**; and 300 in **Edinburgh**. Mental illness hospitals fare even worse, with 45 in England alone due to close at a rate of 4,000 lost beds a year. Those closures in full:

St Audry's, St Nicholas's and St Andrew's in **East Anglian RHA**; St Mary's, St George's and Winterton in **Northern RHA**; Friern, Runwell and St Clement's in **North East Thames RHA**; Hillend, Horton and Fairfield in **North West Thames RHA**; Whittingham in **North Western RHA**; St Crispin's and Littlemore in **Oxford RHA**; Cane Hill, St Augustine's, Hellingly, The Maidstone and Tooting Bec in **South East Thames RHA**; Warlingham Park and Brookwood in **South West Thames RHA**; Coney Hill, Morehaven and Tone Vale in **South Western RHA**; Carlton Hayes, Towers, Mapperley, Middlewood, Pastures and Rauceby in **Trent RHA**; Roundway in **Wessex RHA**; Barnsley Hall, St Mary's, St Edward's, Hollymoor, Rubery Hill, St Matthew's and Central in **West Midlands RHA**; and Scalebor Park, De La Pole, Knaresborough, High Royds, Stanley Royd and Clifton in **Yorkshire RHA**.

Only 10 of the above will be replaced by long-stay units on the same site, and the total number of mental illness beds is set to plummet from more than 75,000 in 1985 to 18,000 by 1999. Considering at least half of all schizophrenic patients need continuing care, Mrs Bottomley's admission — "the pendulum has swung too far" — is an understatement.

● THE PENDULUM is also out of sight when it comes to NHS managers' pay. This rose from £159 million in 1989-90 to £381 million in 1991-92 — a 109 percent increase in real terms. The number of managers themselves has increased by a trifling 18,000 to implement the reforms.



"You've only got three years to live. I'd call an ambulance if I were you"

● **LONDON'S St George's hospital** has recently been forced to close an orthopaedic ward and cancel all elective orthopaedic work due to... lack of funds. Chief executive Andrew Dillon has, however, rustled up £15,000 to pay for the design of a new logo to celebrate the hospital's acquisition of trust status next month. The schoolboy design could easily have been bettered by the hospital's superb in-house audio visual department at a fraction of the cost.

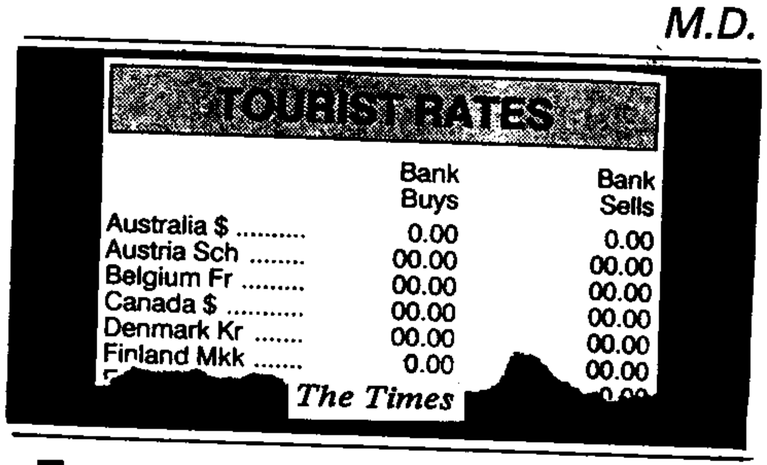
● **WESTON Park Hospital** in **Sheffield**, aka the regional cancer specialist unit, has closed 15 beds to stay within budget. Meanwhile 17 long-stay patients at **Newcourt hospital** in **Exeter** are being turfed out after 30 years because **Exeter and District Community Health Services Trust** can't afford to upgrade the 261-year old building. It can afford to renovate fully this pleasant, ivy-clad Georgian country house and convert it into an administrative base.

● NEVER LET IT be said that the board of the **United Leeds Teaching Hospitals Trust** hasn't got a clear set of priorities. While all around the health service crumbles, the trust has just spent £589,000 of NHS funds to refurbish 14 private rooms at Leeds General Infirmary.

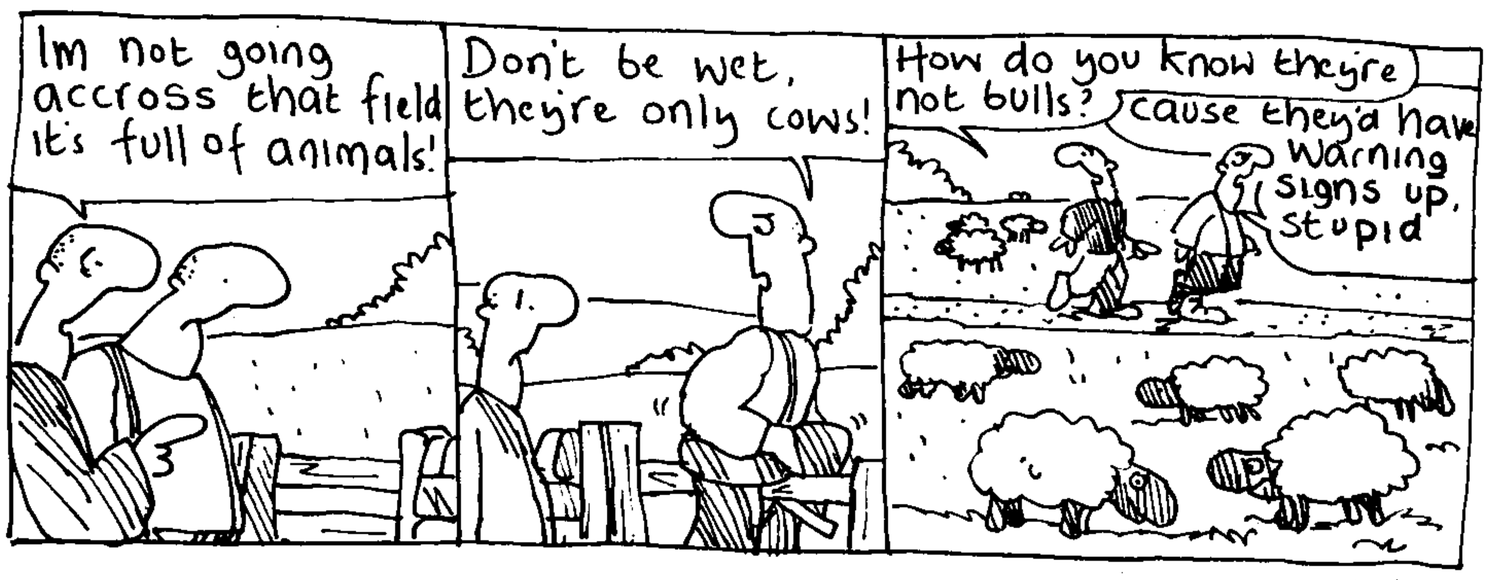
Fee-paying patients now benefit from en-suite bathrooms, private televisions and telephones, coffee percolators, wall-to-wall carpeting and a luxury conservatory — a far cry from the squalor endured by NHS patients.

Trust chiefs justified the spending by saying any profits generated would go back into the hospital. They may have some more explaining to do, however, because the clearly unimpressed local MP Derek Fatchett has asked the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee to investigate.

M.D.



HUSBAND


Im not going accross that field it's full of animals!
Don't be wet, they're only cows!
How do you know they're not bulls?
'cause they'd have warning signs up, stupid

FOLLOWING public outrage at the imminent closure of a Brighton hospice, the Tarner Home (revealed in *Eye* 815), an extraordinary meeting of the management council on March 17 resulted in the resignation of Trevor Vokins and his fellow trustee, and the withdrawal of redundancy notices to staff.

The chair of the council, Mary Turton, has made a public commitment to keeping Tarner open and in its current premises while negotiations over the hospice's financial problems and longterm future continue. Staff, patients and supporters are delighted with the council's U-turn and look forward to a period of more enlightened and efficient management. A £300,000 appeal — a mere £1 for everyone in the Brighton health area — is now to be launched to help cover the running costs of the home (donations to: Friends of the Tarner Home, c/o Private Eye).

Letters

Cover girl

Sir,

I wish to complain about your last cover (EYE *815). Should this not have been distributed in a brown wrapper with suitable warnings about its contents?*

A thing like that could give a chap a nasty turn; it certainly did me.

Yours behind the sofa,
MARTIN BRADLEY,

Hampton, Middlesex.

Evil seducer

Sir,

It's nice to see that Brian Basham has not given up his attempts to justify actions which he undertook on behalf of British Airways. Such attempts are rather touching and a powerful tribute to the wonders of selective memory.

In the last EYE, *he stated that, in terms of the* CONCISE OXFORD DICTIONARY *definition of the word, he probably did "smear" Richard Branson, but appeared to deny that he had damaged Virgin by telling lies.*

It is worth recalling that in early 1991 Brian Basham produced a report, on Virgin and Richard Branson, which contained many errors. It was produced for his client, British Airways. He circulated the report, with the knowledge of his client, to various newspapers. He briefed several journalists and embellished the contents of the report with untrue and defamatory stories regarding Virgin Atlantic. One example of such a story he perpetrated was that Virgin could no longer obtain credit for aviation fuel from a supplier — a potentially extremely damaging lie.

I also have been looking at the CONCISE OXFORD DICTIONARY *and was very interested to see the following:*

BASH a) strike bluntly or heavily
b) (often followed by — UP) attack violently.

I wonder how long it will be before the COD *introduces a third definition:*

BASH c) (often followed by AM) smear VIRGINS.

Numerous newspaper reports over the last 12 months have quoted Brian Basham as threatening to sue Thames Television (producers of the VIOLATING VIRGIN *documentary) and others. Where are the writs?*

Yours sincerely,
WILL WHITEHORN,

Corporate Affairs Director, Virgin Group of Companies, London W8.

Member's rates

Sir,

Both readers of PRIVATE EYE *in Wakefield have pointed out our recent appearance in Rotten Boroughs. If only it were true!*

Despite your advance notification that councillors are awarding themselves a £4,000 pay rise, I can only find reference to a £6,000 CUT in the Members Allowance Budget. Shome mishtake shirely?

Wakefield Council is 19¾ years old.

Yours sincerely,
COLIN L CROXALL,

Leader of Wakefield District Council, Wakefield, West Yorkshire.

Honest Bob

Sir,

You are doing the loveable MP for Woking a disservice by suggesting he is making an honest bob or two by being a consultant to "British Helicopters", (HP SAUCE, EYE 815).

Cranley Onslow, the Parliamentary expert on rotary flight, is a consultant to "Bristow" Helicopters. This company has little defence input other than a contract to teach the young gentlemen of the army to fly helicopters at Middle Wallop.

"Bristow" flew John Major and his soapbox around during the last election.

British International Helicopters is the other large UK helicopter company. You will recall that the Government sold it to Robert Maxwell ("Never should be allowed the stewardship of a public company") when it was preparing British Airways for privatisation. Maxwell brought in Eric Middleton to run the company but administrators Arthur Anderson dispensed with his services soon after taking over.

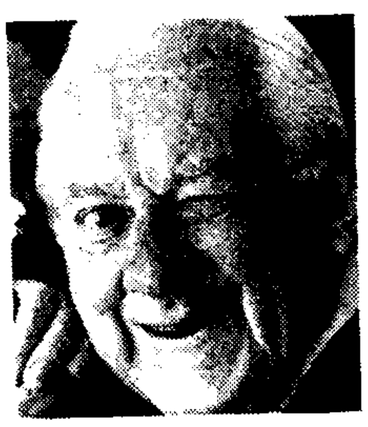
All the staff lost their pensions and at a recent discussion with Lord (Saviour of Shetland) Caithness they were told that the Government has no responsibility for the sale, at a knock down price, to Maxwell. Captain Bob bought the company for £13 million, pinched the assets, stole the pensions, and it has now been sold for £32 million to the management.

Maybe helicopter consultant Cranley would like to cast his expert eye over the scandal of the sale of this company in 1986.

Yours sincerely,
RON UMLEITUNG,

London, E1.

Lookalike



Hussey

Hughie

Sir,

Has anyone else noticed the extraordinary resemblance between Hughie Greene and Marmaduke Hussey? I'm sure they must be related...

Yours,
ENA B. PARKER,

London WC2.

Crystal clear

Sir,

Joyce Epstein's letter (26 February) concerning cot deaths coincided with the good news that there had been a dramatic reduction in cot deaths within the Avon area.

Professor Flemming, who highlighted these statistics, believes that the Anne Diamond campaign to encourage mothers to lay babies on their backs had been the prime reason for these excellent results.

What interests me is why the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths had not made similar proposals when the link between babies' positions and cot deaths had been established some five years earlier.

Perhaps the Foundation would also like to review the fact that currently no British Standards exist to limit the amount of arsenic, antimony or phosphorous that can be applied to cot mattresses to make them fire retardant. Surely this must be a cause for concern for all parents of young children?

Yours sincerely,
PETER BROWN,

Managing Director, TOMY Uk Ltd, Sutton, Surrey.

Crank shafted

Sir,

Francis Bennion's letter (EYE *815) does him no service. Anyone reading it will be inclined to think him an ill-natured yet pitiable old crank. In fairness, I must say that this would not be an entirely accurate view.*

Mr Bennion is the author of THE SEX CODE: MORALS FOR MODERNS *(Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1991). This makes the best case for sexual libertarianism that I have ever read. I was particularly impressed by his discussion of child sexuality and the more extreme kinds of pornography. He goes somewhat further in this first matter than I do, and has an eagerness that I do not share for making ethical prescriptions. Even so, his is a remarkable book. I published a laudatory review of it in my own magazine,* FREE LIFE: A JOURNAL OF CLASSICAL LIBERAL AND LIBERTARIAN THOUGHT, *and I still would recommend it to your readers.*

The problem is that, as a campaign leader, Mr Bennion is insufferable. Since 1990, I have been the secretary of Conservatives Against Sex Censorship (CASC), a small group dedicated to fighting the Whitehouse tendency within the party. Though for much of the time out of England, I found time to address a fringe meeting at the last party conference and have written a few pamphlets.

Mr Bennion joined this group two years ago as chairman. During his brief tenure, he unilaterally changed its name to Tories for Ethical Sex (TOES) — a name at which I cringe with embarrassment — and on his few attendances at committee meetings regarded disagreement as insolence. His one positive contribution, to arrange a fringe meeting at the 1991 party conference, came to nothing. He wrote to several MPs, inviting them in what I thought a rather condescending manner to attend this meeting. When they all declined his invitation, he cancelled the meeting — again on his own initiative. I was left with the job of explaining to several journalists, including Matthew Parris, who had agreed to sit in the audience, that no meeting would in fact take place.

Having cancelled the meeting, Mr Bennion ignored all further correspondence. He was removed from the list of committee officers, and the name was changed back to CASC. I heard nothing more of him until I saw his deeply regrettable letter this morning.

When Mr Bennion is dead, I hope that he will be remembered above all else as a brave campaigner for freedom. Accordingly, I will ignore the venom of his attack on me in your last issue, and invite your readers to do likewise.

Yours sincerely,
SEAN GABB.

London SE6.

Gromblers

Sir,

I refer to your recent Nooks and Corners article on the proposed opening of Groombridge Place gardens to the public (EYE *814).*

Far from being in "deepest Kent" the house and spectacular grounds are directly adjacent to the river Grom, which is the county border.

There really is a lot of humbug being talked about the proposed changes to the estate. First it should be understood that only the house is grade 1 listed and apart from a new gate in the garden wall, to facilitate wheelchair access, no alterations to the house are proposed. The main developments consist of an "Education and catering centre" some 250m from the house and the creation of a car park.

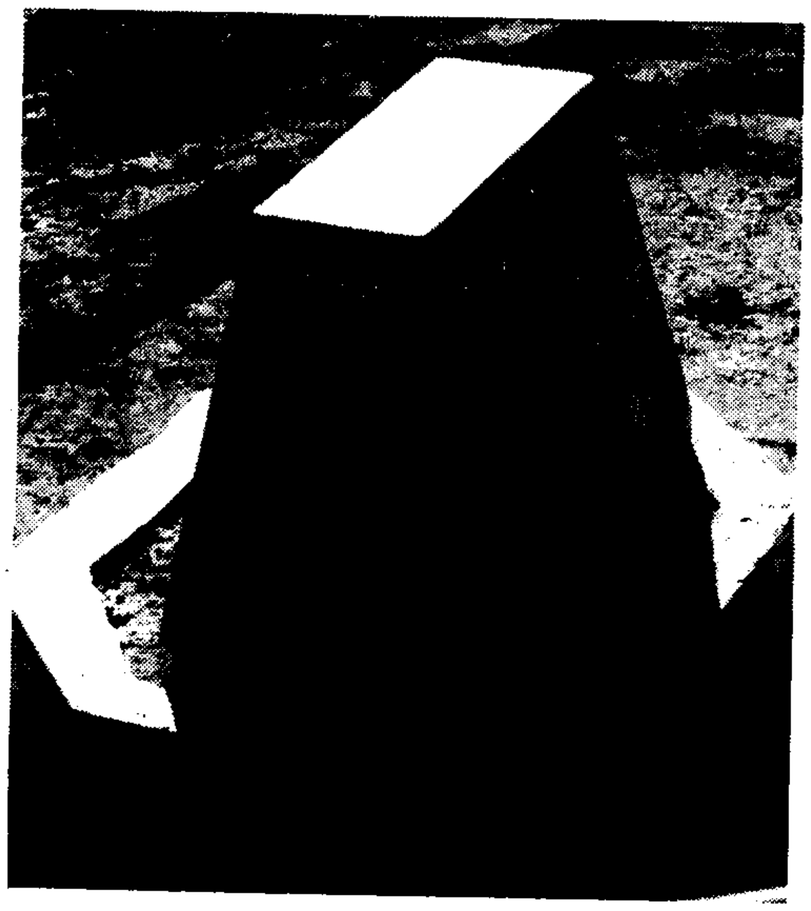
The proposed car park is NOT *to be situated in the ground of the house but in an adjacent field on the southern side of the river (muddy stream).*

At a public meeting in the village school the architect advising the objectors suggested that if Andrew de Candole surrendered his rights under the non-agricultural uses of agricultural land (Class B permitted development) then objections would be withdrawn. The inference being that the objectors are more concerned about what "events" could be held at Groombridge Place during the 28 days allowed (clay pigeon shooting, moto-cross racing etc) rather than any consideration for the "unspoiled Elizabethan estate".

Yours faithfully,
JOHN W SHARPLES,

Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

I-SPY *Etosha Game Reserve, Namibia*



Submitted by Roo Hechle. £10 paid for similar submissions. (SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)

Dukedon

Sir,

*You clearly have a special interest currently in the University of Manchester (*EYE *815), but it would be nice if, one of these days, your contributor(s) could get the information right. The reference to the Duke of Westminster is wrongly attributed to the university's well-known newsletter* THIS WEEK, *so we cannot lay claim on this occasion to the OBN. The duke has, however, been appointed chancellor of our neighbouring institution, the Manchester Metropolitan University.*

Yours sincerely,
PHILIP RADCLIFFE,

Director of Communications, University of Manchester, Manchester.

Research fellowship

Sir,

How much evidence for Jeffrey Dahmer's racism does Brian Masters require? (Letters, EYE *815) Maybe he thinks the named sources in Joel Norris's book who call Dahmer a racist "got it wrong". After all, they only knew the murderer personally whereas Masters "researched" him.*

Yours faithfully,
TONY ADDAMS,

Hove, Sussex.

Now in urea

Sir,

*Contrary to HP Sauce's assertion (*EYE *815) the privatised Railfreight will not need subsidies. It is highly profitable, the more so since Christmas when it embarked on a programme of dumping "marginal" (ie not highly profitable) traffic into the laps of the road hauliers. To date these have included annual traffic flows of 300,000 tons (my estimate) of cement from Clitheroe (Lancs) to Glasgow; 100,000 tons of steel from Boston (Lincs) to Birmingham; and 100,000 tons of cement and urea out of King's Lynn docks. Detailed reports have appeared in* MODERN RAILWAYS *and* RAIL *magazines, these being my sources.*

There is method in the apparent madness of MacGregor. The headlines and column inches, including your own, are hogged by his ravings about passenger privatisation while the cash cow is led quietly off to pastures new. At a snip of a price, no doubt.

Yours sincerely,
PETE CONROY,

Nether Edge, Sheffield.

Straight sex

Sir,

Thank you so much for your kind plug for my novel, THE INSIDERS, *published by Piatkus at £14.99.*

I would like to put one thing straight. Elliott Bernard and I have been friends since 1984. We have never been lovers.

Yours faithfully,
JUDI BEVAN,

London SE16.

Grouch

Sir,

*Thanks for the Grovel plug (*EYE 815*) in which you imply I didn't want Knight-Bruce as a member because he wrote about me throwing someone out of a window (last words: "Fook it!" - he hailed from Dublin). In fact I don't want Knight-Bruce as a member for different reasons:*

1. Seven of Blacks Committee (a hundred women) threatened to resign if I let him join.

2. The owners of two other clubs (of which he is a member) warned me that he vomits everywhere - except the loo.

3. My partner will not accept members with an IQ of less than a hundred.

Yours faithfully,
TOM BANCOCK,

Blacks, London, W1.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

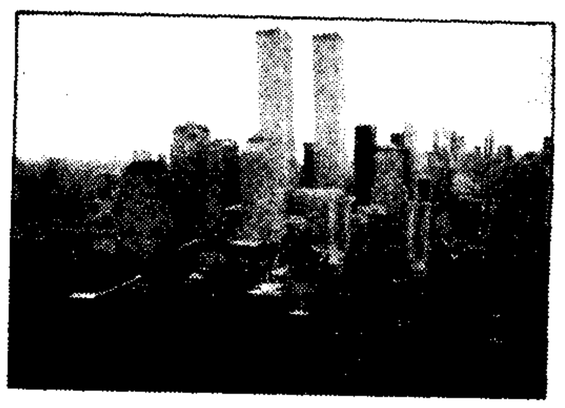
"It takes two sides to make a Final, and Widnes have done just that."
RAY FRENCH, BBC1
(Rex Walford)

"England have had the great thoughts of theirs of winning the Triple Crown dashed from their hands."
BILL McLAREN, BBC1
(D.H. Green)

Brian Hayes: *If I were to blindfold you and play you one extract from a real Beatles song and one from a bootleg version, would you be able to tell the difference?*
Interviewee: *Why would I need a blindfold?*
Midweek, Radio 4
(Ashley Howard)

"We've been sold down the garden path."
NIGEL KENNEDY, Radio 4
(Christopher Murphy)

"Leeds have got to shake off all the emotion they've been drained of over the last few days."
TONY GUBBA, BBC1
(Eddie Marchant)



Letter from the **Big Apple**

from Our Own Correspondent

THE World Trade Centre bomb in New York has revealed many things about the United States justice system, but mostly that it is perfectly acceptable for us to insult a racial group so long as it is comprised of Arabs.

Irish American columnist Jimmy Breslin would *never* describe the controversial black leader Al Sharpton as "thick-lipped" or our Jewish former mayor Ed Koch as "hook nosed". But he did refer to the chief suspect in the World Trade Centre case, Mohamed Salameh, as "falcon nosed"; and his alleged conspirator Nidal Ayyad had the "face of a terrorist".

Ayyad's other problem was having a joint bank account with Salameh, and a degree in industrial chemistry.

So what happened to the happy notion that people are innocent until proven guilty? If one examines the evidence against the two, their main problem is indeed that they are Arabs.

Salameh reported to police the day before the explosion that the van alleged to have been used had been stolen. Acting very suspiciously for a bomber, he then returned four times to collect his deposit from the rental company.

He attended a mosque where an Egyptian fundamentalist, Sheik Omar Abdul-Rahman, preached; but he had opposed the sheik's slate in elections for the mosque's council. He had also had money transferred from relatives abroad, and had a storage locker in which the FBI found some chemicals they claimed were nitric and sulphuric acids and urea.

As such stuff is found on every school chemistry lab shelf, and is not in any way unstable, it is a mystery why the FBI should want to take it to Liberty State park and flamboyantly explode it — thereby destroying the evidence. But then, one piece of chemistry that was invoked at the start of proceedings was the positive identification by "nitrate tests" on the rental documents. The same tests that led to many of your innocent Irish people being wrongly imprisoned for years, perhaps?

The fact that the suspects knew the sheik himself is mentioned in every FBI dispatch. What is mentioned *sotto voce* is that FBI has had the sheik under surveillance for months, so if he were involved, it implies some degree of negligence on their part. Indeed, it has even been suggested that the sheik was allowed into our country in return for favours rendered to "the company" in Afghanistan, where he helped rally the *good* fundamentalists for the great *jihad* against the Soviets.

Desperate to stay in the United States, since only here are loonies like him, Kahane and Koresh tolerated, the sheik might have felt that blowing up the world's second tallest building could be prejudicial to his immigration hearing. Or then again, maybe not.

HOM SAP

BY DAVID AUSTIN

TRUE STORIES

CHRISTOPHER LOGUE

Bert Kitchen

SPEAKING on his brother's behalf, Mr Glynne Hunte, said: "Julian is President of the Outdoor Club of Barbados and — in spite of the American champion Julie Ridge's fatal attempt last year — he decided on a solo swim around the Island to highlight the misery of local nature lovers.

"The plan came to him in the night, so when he took to the water at 8 a.m. on the start of his 80-mile journey wearing only khaki shorts and with a tyre as a support raft there was no countdown and no crowd."

Miss Jane Suns, the Outdoor Club's secretary, said: "Julian decided on his Swim For Nature after he was mugged. He said: 'I must do something about the robbing and raping, as well as the garbage that is dumped on the beach.' He is asking all those living above subsistence level to donate one dollar per mile."

Mr Aldon Browne, a spectator, said: "Following his dive from the Careenage Bridge, it took Mr Hunte 15 minutes to cover the 400 yards that took him into the open sea. He waved his hand to the joggers on the quayside, and then vanished in a southerly direction. He has no means of communication with land and he gave his swim a low profile so as not to alarm his family. He plans to do most of his swimming by night, as he needs to be fully alert during the day to avoid the hammerhead sharks that feed along the east coast. During the day he will climb onto his tyre to rest."

ON HIS evidence, Mr Plumstead admitted that he fired a shot at Mr James James because of Mr James's failure to get an erection. "My girlfriend, Sharon Pickett, and I decided on a threesome. James was recommended to us by a well-known escort agency. He turned up on time and we gave him a beer. The ground rules were: nothing anal, no same-sex, no intimate kissing, and no ejaculation inside Ms Pickett. Then we got down to it. But he couldn't get an erection. He said the ground rules were inhibiting him, and in any case he had done four jobs that evening before he reached us. So I asked him to return my $260 and leave, saying he could have another beer on his way out. But he said he had done his level best and he was going to keep the money. So I fired a shot from a rifle into the roof."

ON THE course of a speech he made to the magistrates and police chiefs of Mutare Province, Attorney-General Patrick Chinamasa said: "The government is considering legislation to criminalize the dumping of corpses at people's homes. This is becoming prevalent. Certainly it is undesirable. The dumping occurs when the family of the deceased dumps the body on the doorstep of the person they blame for his or her death." Commenting on the Attorney-General's speech, Chief Inspector Rais Umube said: "There has been a lot of it going on. One man has had eight bodies dumped on his lawn, and I know for a fact he had nothing to do with the dead ones."

MR James Monk of Ealing has been fined for exposing himself to two female passers-by who turned out to be plain-clothes policewomen.

INFORMATION: Barbados Advocate 10.12.92; Canberra Times 5.2.93; Zimbabwe Daily Gazette 23.1.93; Ealing Gazette 5.2.93. MONITORS: John Nicholson, Frances Templeton, Islay Rhind, Helen Hardy & Andy Santos.

"Hi, honey - I'm homo sapiens"

NEW GP IN AIDS SCARE

'No one at risk' says BBC

by Our Medical Staff **H.I.V. Positive**

THE SCOTTISH village of Tannochbrae, Scotland (pop. 27) was last night reported to be in a "state of shock" when it was reported that local GP Dr Hamish Finlay had been diagnosed as suffering from AIDS.

Following the disclosure, the BBC announced that it was setting up a special "Tannochbrae Helpline", to advise viewers who had been exposed to the TV series that they were "not at risk".

"As far as we know," said a spokesman, "the virus cannot be transmitted through television, but as a precaution we are advising viewers to wear rubber gloves before turning the set on or off."

The local Tannochbrae health chief, Dr Enoch Snoddy, issued a statement emphasising that Dr Finlay had "at no time" had contact with any of his patients, since he was "only a figment of the imagination".

Dr Cameron is 106.

In Memoriam

Professor C. Northcote Parkinson

So. Farewell
Then

C. Northcote
Parkinson.

Famous for
Parkinson's Law.

Work expands
To fill the
Time available.

Thribb's Law
States.

Poems expand
To fill the
Space available.

As can be
Seen in
The case of

This one.

E. Northcote Thribb (17½)

EYE BUYS FERGIE PIX

£2 million deal clinched by Harpies and Gnome

by our Court Correspondent
Her Majesty Harpers and Queen

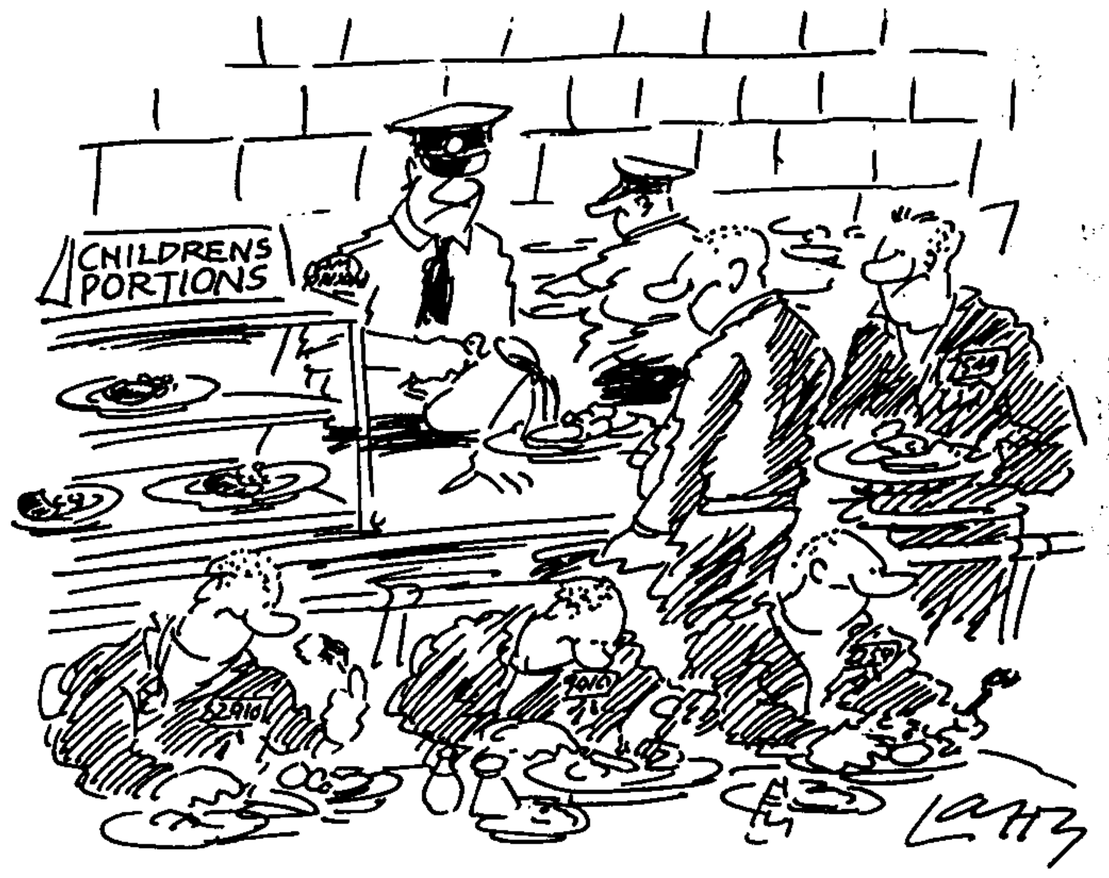
■ *PRIVATE EYE* is proud to present exclusive colour portraits of Her Royal Highness the Grand Duchess of Fergiana. The World's Most Beautiful Woman and Top International Model is captured here by the Fashion Industry's most distinguished photographer, Armani Zoot.

Using a Poltax Contac 2000 wide-angled teletracking autolens, Zoot's portraits present the Duchess as never seen before. This triptych is an international first for the magazine.

Harpers and Gnome, in conjunction with John Bryan plc, incorporating Fergie Pix Adult Promotions™ (Offices Soho, Marseilles, Bangkok), would like to make it clear that they have the sole and exclusive rights to these photographs and any attempt to reproduce them by any means will result in a letter from Mr Peter Carter-Fuck.

THE THREE FACES OF FERGIE

Mysterious ***Untouchable*** ***Extremely Greedy***
(Shurely shome mistake, Ed.)



SPRING BOOKS

Biography Special

Daphne du Maurier
by Margaret Forster-comeupwiththisstuffto-spiceitupabit

Author Forster looks behind the literary figure of Dame Daphne du Maurier to reveal a raging old bull-dyke.

Lord Poof of the BBC
by Ian Muckytale

Author Muckytale looks behind the legendary broadcasting genius and founder of the BBC to reveal a crazed homosexual driven by criminal desires for members of a local scout troop.

J. Edgar Poofter
by A. Merican-Hack

Author Merican-Hack looks behind the sinister figure of the Chief of the FBI and reveals a nancy-boy cross-dresser who flaunted his perverted tastes to no one at all.

Madonna
by A.N. Other-Hack

Author Other-Hack looks behind the crazed porno queen and sado-masochist to reveal a demure home-loving housewife living quietly in Milton Keynes with her bank manager husband Reginald and their cat, Perkins.

(That's enough books, Ed.)

LUZ
BY CUTTER PERKINS & RGJ
THE NEW CLASSLESS AWARDS ARE THE SAME FOR OFFICERS AND MEN ALIKE. AS THEIR COLONEL, I'D LIKE YOU TO DELIVER THESE.
FOR GALLANTRY IN BOSNIA - THE P45
BROWN NOSE DAY..
I'D LIKE TA GAN TA BOSNIA BUT ME HANDS ARE TIED!
AYE - AND DIVVENT YA LOVE IT! FNARR!
EX-ROYALS CHILDREN IN DISTRESS
COLLECTION
MEBBE YA SHOULD TRY CHASTITY NEXT!
SICK BAG
DIVVENT FORGET, YOU'RE GANNIN' OOT TA RAISE THEIR MORALE!
AND MY PROFILE! SNIFFA'S NOT TH' URNLYUN WHAT CAN GAN ABROAD!
TAXI
PHIL'S CABS BY APPT.
THAT'LL BE FIFTY QUID - NOT INCLUDIN' WOR TIP!
No 15
MEANWHILE...
GOOD OLD MR. BLOBBY! IT'S A BUDGET FER AAL QUEEN MOTHERS EVERYWHERE!
DAILY DAILY
GREAT NEWS FOR RACEHORSE OWNING SPIRITS DRINKERS
CHEERS!

The Secret Diary of John Major aged 47¾

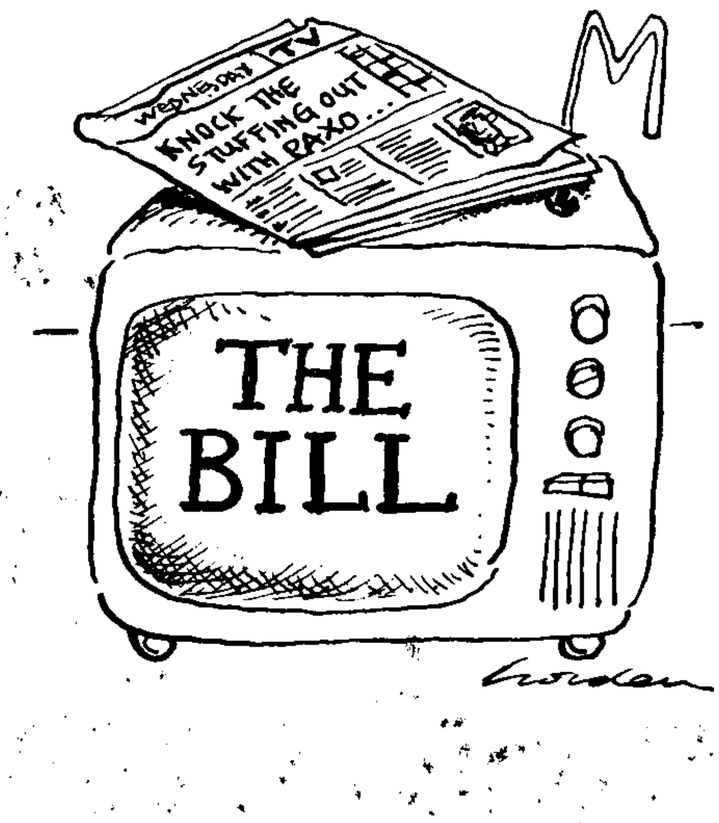
Monday

Tonight will be a very historic day. The House of Commons will be voting on amendment no.746 on my Maastricht bill, which relates to the highly important question of the European Regional Cohesion Footpaths Fund. I hope I have made it clear to everyone that if we lose this vote, it will be a very serious blow indeed to my government's standing in Europe and that I shall have no option but to resign. Or not. I have asked my Deputy Chief Whip, Mr Lightbulb, not to have any hesitation in "breaking the legs" of any Conservative MPs who are irresponsible enough to vote against me (not literally of course!). He will tell them in no uncertain terms that it is absolutely vital to this country's future that my Maastricht Treaty should be ratified, and he will tell them all the very important things that it does not include due to my not inconsiderable negotiating skills — eg, no compulsory driving on the right-hand side, cricket to be retained as a national sport and the Queen's head to be left on the stamps until 1999.

Tuesday

For some reason, all the newspapers seem to think that just because we lost last night's vote on Maastricht that this is a matter of grave importance. It is typical of the press these days to blow up everything into a great scare story, such as the affair that I did not have with the cook. As Mr Hurd patiently explained to a very rude reporter called Paxman last night: "It really does not matter what the House of Commons thinks about Maastricht. We have signed the treaty and that is all there is to it. We've all had enough of these absurd Euro-sceptics saying that Parliament has lost its sovereignty. Who cares what they think?"

Talking of Mr Hurd, he has confided in me, via the *Daily Telegraph*, that he does not want to be Foreign Secretary for much longer. I told him I was very sorry that he was going to retire. "Oh, no, Prime Minister," he laughed, "I did not say I was going to retire. Who knows, I might be needed for another job?" He looked at me rather strangely. I wonder what he has in mind?



Wednesday

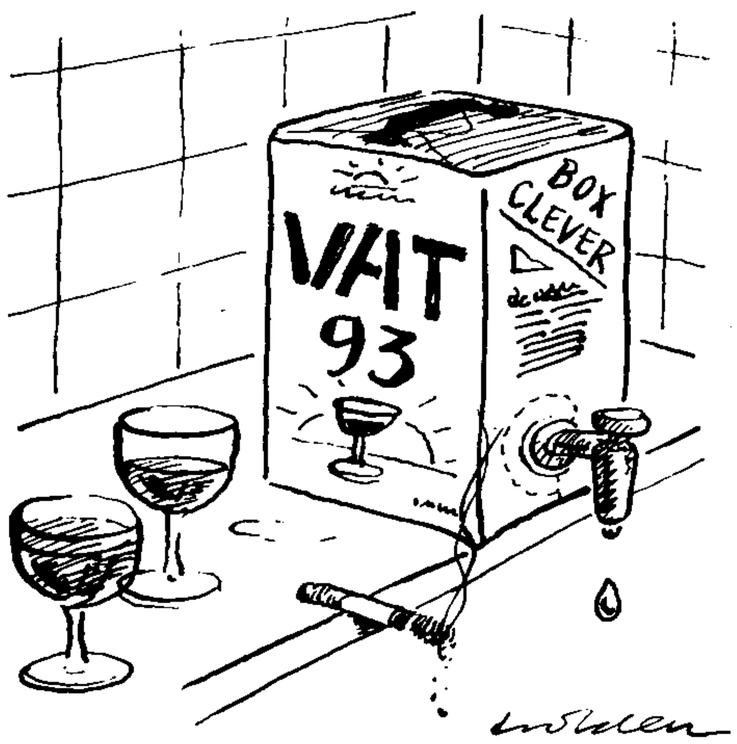
Today Norma Lamont really showed everyone how right I was to keep him on as Chancellor. He made a really brilliant speech, which was so clever that I must admit there were some bits which even I could not follow! There was a huge cheer from our side when he announced that he was not going to put up the taxes this year. This is just what we promised in the election and it is good to see that we have stuck to it! Norma then followed this up with a brilliant new idea for raising the money we need to pay off our debts. As from next year he is going to put up everyone's heating bills. No Chancellor has ever thought of this before. I wonder why this is?

Thursday

The papers have got it completely wrong again. This morning they all said "Tories Put Up Tax In Biggest Ever U-Turn". When I went round to see Norma to commiserate with him on being misunderstood, he was just coming through the door with a Thresher's "Beat The Budget" wine pack under his arm. "Have you seen the newspapers?" I asked him. "They are trying to make out that you are putting up taxes." "Oh, that is a technical misunderstanding", he explained, lighting up two Raffles cigarettes and smoking them both rather nervously. "I was simply trying to ensure that the Government meets its environmental obligations under the Rio Treaty by discouraging old age pensioners from using too much fuel." I was very reassured by this. "You see, Prime Minister," he went on, "I am very green". He certainly looked it for that time of the morning.

Friday

I read in the *Daily Mail* that Norma Lamont is to keep his job as a result of his brilliant budget speech. This is good news because he has become in no small measure unpopular for putting up heating bills. I mentioned this in our cabinet meeting but, as ever, Norma had the answer.



"I will have made so much money putting VAT on heating that I can give it all back to pensioners who can't afford to pay the bills."

There were gasps when he said this, as everyone was clearly in awe of Norma's financial acumen. Oh yes.

Just then, Mr Waldegrave brought in a cake which his wife who is an excellent cook (and whom I have never met, let me make it clear) had made specially. It had 60 candles on it and the words "Happy Retirement, Mr Heseltine". Michael did not seem to like this very much, pointing out that he was inconsiderably younger than Mr Hurd.

Everyone laughed and Mr Waldegrave, as he handed me my slice of cake (which, incidentally, I judged to be smaller than everyone else's), said: "Many people in top jobs retire at fifty nowadays, Prime Minister, because of the strain."

I tried to think whom I knew who was fifty, but everyone there was either older or younger.

POETRY CORNER

Lines on the departure of Fiona Armstrong from GMTV

So. Farewell
Then.

Fiona Armstrong.

Presenter of
Good Morning
Television.

You were
Meant to have
The F-Factor.

Now it's
Your turn
To F-off.

EJTV Thribb (17½)

ENGLAND: Those Averages in full

Stewart	Average
Gatting	Very average
Smith	Extremely average
Fairbrother	Below average
Hick	Well above *his* average
Gooch	Well below average

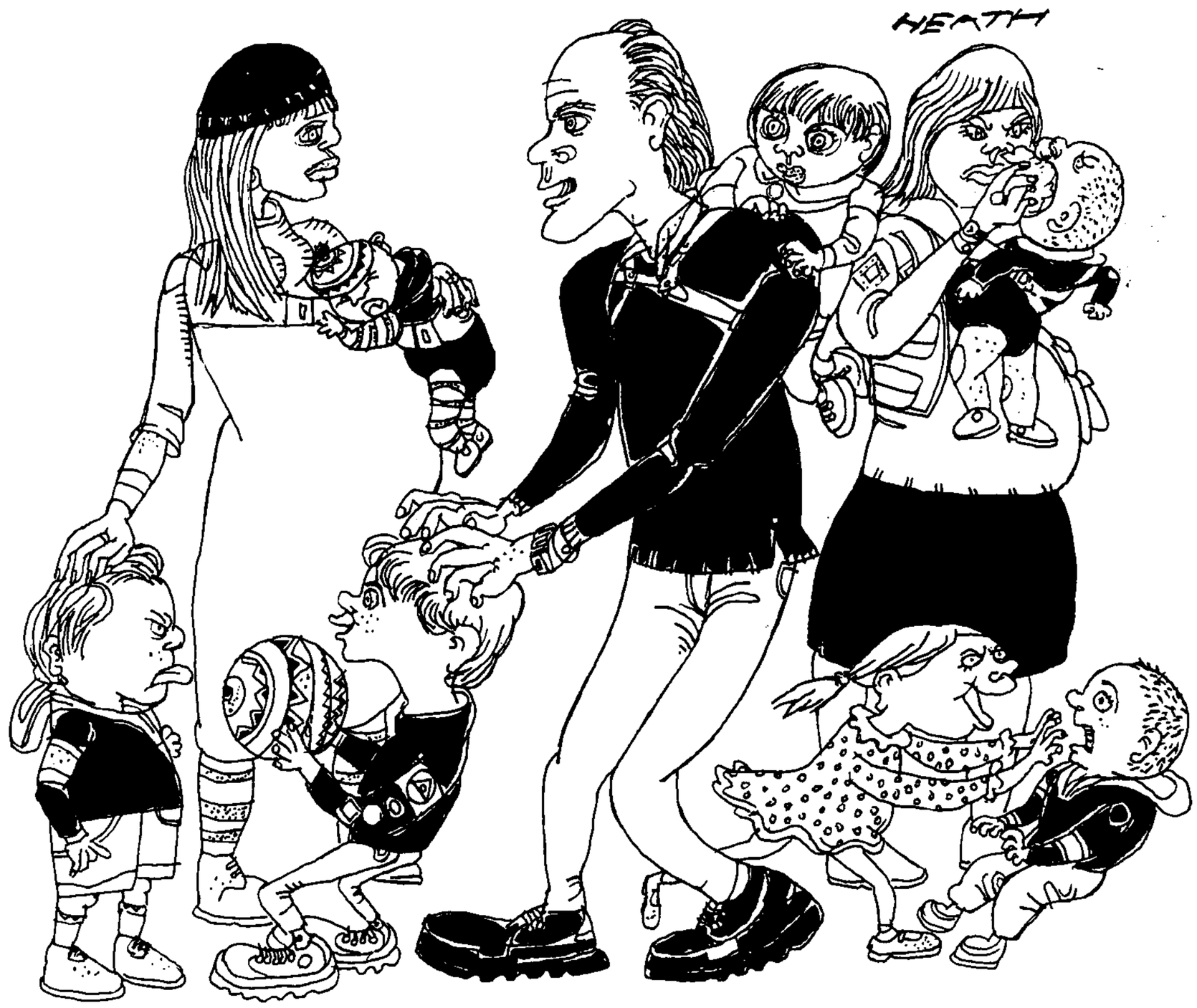
(This is too depressing. Ed.)

Cricket — Late Score

Sri Lanka Under-12 Colts B-Team **637-4 dec.**
(P.D.Q. Warmaweatha 156, D. Cash-andcarri 102, B.J. Challengeanneka 100 n.o., V.D.U. Onanuga-choochoo 94, S.F. Kiritekanawa 133 n.o., J.R. Hartley 412 inc. VAT)

England (1st Innings) **34**
(I.P.Z. Verrislowbowla 7-3)

England (2nd Innings) **23**
(R.S.I. Chukkaspinna 5-10)

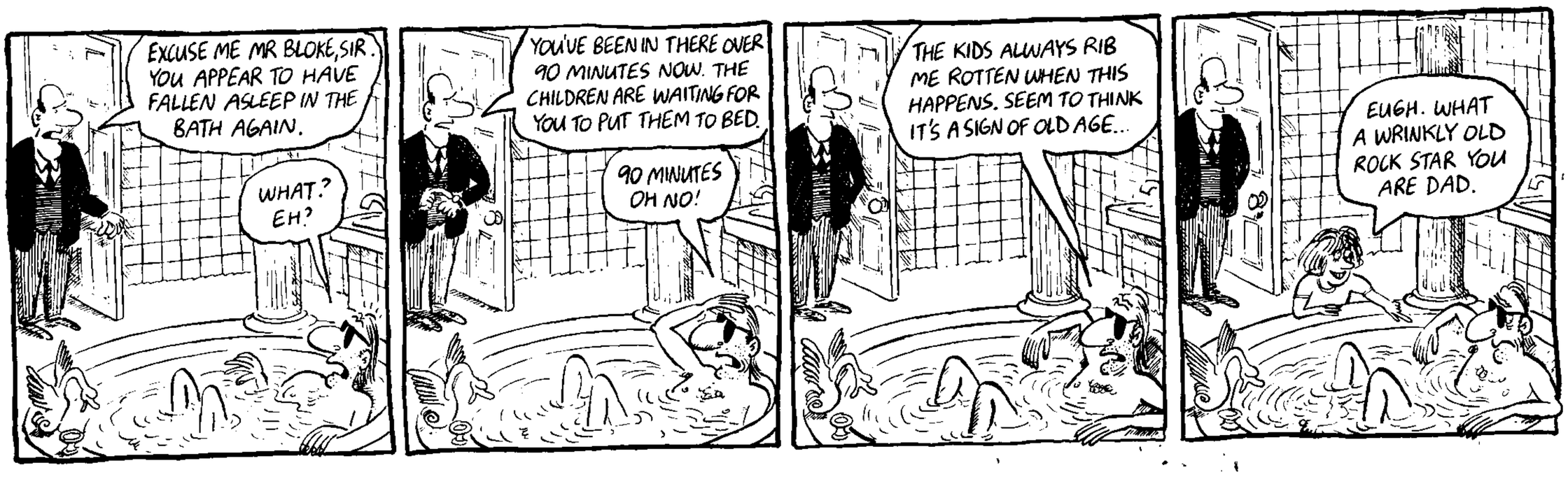


Great Bores Of Today.

"... we've always rationed their viewing just an hour before they go to bed unless it's a wildlife programme or a documentary but you have to keep your eye on those nowadays some parents we know just dump the kids in front of the set for hours it's the easy way out and of course we're all tempted as soon as they get back from school they just put it on and the poor things sit glued to it for hours just vegetating we find that interacting with them is much more satisfying even it does mean a bit of extra time with them quality time is what counts mind you not all programmes are rubbish there's *Sesame Street* which is very well produced and actually highly informative even though it comes from America Emma reads to all of them every day as well which means they exercise their imaginations rather than just passively absorbing this muck like blotting paper we don't have a video which is a blessing so they don't watch the stuff that circulates at school getting away from the television environment is terribly important we were watching this programme about the under-5s the other night it was fascinating..."

Celeb

LIGGER


EXCUSE ME MR BLOKE, SIR. YOU APPEAR TO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP IN THE BATH AGAIN.
WHAT? EH?
YOU'VE BEEN IN THERE OVER 90 MINUTES NOW. THE CHILDREN ARE WAITING FOR YOU TO PUT THEM TO BED.
90 MINUTES OH NO!
THE KIDS ALWAYS RIB ME ROTTEN WHEN THIS HAPPENS. SEEM TO THINK IT'S A SIGN OF OLD AGE...
EUGH. WHAT A WRINKLY OLD ROCK STAR YOU ARE DAD.

Come off it, Birt!!

writes **Lunchtime O'Booze**

© *All newspapers*

THE sickening spectacle of a man fiddling his expenses is almost too sickening to contemplate.

Especially when he occupies a prominent position in the media.

Come off it, Birt!

The public have a right to expect the highest moral standards from those who work in the media.

That is why every right-thinking journalist on Fleet Street joins me in saying today — John Birt must go.

Memo to Editor

Hope this will do. I enclose note on my exes for this piece:

To Expenses on Birt Feature

Lunch with imaginary Senior BBC Contact	£300.00
Drinks with media sources	£552.00
Taxis to and from above	£720.00
New suit for interviewing Marmaduke Gussett (interview cancelled, suit kept)	£460.00
Petrol (for taxi)	£121.00
TOTAL	£21,612.00

cheers! L.O'B

BBC NEWS AT NINE

NEWSREADER *(Martyn Lewis, for it is he):* The main news today is that I support my boss John Birt. And so do many of my colleagues. For a full report on the growing tide of support for John Birt, over to our Economics Editor Peter Jay...

JAY: Forget about this afternoon's Budget — the big story of the day is how I've come out in support of my old friend John Birt.

(Cut to graph showing how Jay's salary has risen by 400 per cent under Birt)

LEWIS: Now, for another special report on today's main story, our Social Affairs Editor Polly Technic (now the University of Toynbee)...

TOYNBEE (outside Job Centre): This is the one place John Birt shouldn't be. *(Cut to film of worried ex-BBC employees looking at boards)* You won't find any of these cards advertising a vacancy for Director-General of the BBC. That's because it takes a man of extraordinary vision, honesty and leadership qualities to give me a regular slot droning on every night.

LEWIS: And news is just coming in that Polly Technic, the widely respected Social Affairs Editor of the BBC, has thrown her weight behind the growing campaign to keep John Birt in office. But now, for the political dimension to this crisis, over to our Political Editor Robin Oakley, at Westminster...

OAKLEY: Some MPs here at Westminster may still be debating the Maastricht Treaty. But the real question in the corridors of the Palace of Westminster tonight is whether I support John Birt in his gallant fight to hold on to his job. And the answer has to be an unqualified yes.

LEWIS: And now today's Foreign News...

(Film of John Simpson next to UN tank in Sarajevo)

SIMPSON: I support John Birt all the way. Goodnight.

LEWIS: Thank you, John. And now tomorrow's weather from Ian McCaskill...

SMALL EXCITABLE SCOTS PERSON WITH GLASSES: Hullo. Well, there's a cloud over John Birt at the moment, but it's not going to last. During the week it'll move slowly away and settle over Hussey. Quite right, too. Good night.

CONTINUITY: And now Peter Sissons tells us what's in store on *Question Time* later this evening.

SISSONS: My guests tonight are Mr Will Wyatt, Mr David Hatch, Ms Liz Forgan and someone else who owes their vast salary to John Birt. And we'll be agreeing that Mr Birt should stay on in his job. Yes, you sir, the man in the expensive suit and the glasses.

BBC RADIO FOUR Highlights

9.05am Call Nick Ross
Listeners are invited to ring in with their views on the burning moral issue of the day — should John Birt resign? Nick says no.

10.00am Prayer For Today
Director-General John Birt offers prayers of intercession to keep his job.

10.15am Money Box
Louise Botting asks: "Are you paying too much tax?" She talks to business consultant J. Birt on how going self-employed could save you £800 a year.

10.16am Armani Box
Selina Scott looks at the world of male fashion and shows how you can afford Italian suits by going on Schedule D.

10.30am Woman's Hour
Jenni Murray talks about the problems of combining the roles of company director and secretary with staying at home looking after the children. Today's guest: Ms Emmie-Lou Birt.

11.15am Morning Story
John Birt tells a delightful fairy tale about his income tax.

12.30pm Face The Facts
Radio 4 examines why the Inland Revenue turns a blind eye to obvious fiddles by senior company executives.

2.00pm Famous For 15 Minutes
Ex-jailbird Mark Henshaw was an obscure accountant when suddenly he found himself in the national spotlight as John Birt's personal financial adviser.

2.45pm The Auditors *(serial)*
An everyday story of accountancy folk. This week Ernst and Young are worried about John's clothing allowance. Will the Revenue wear it?

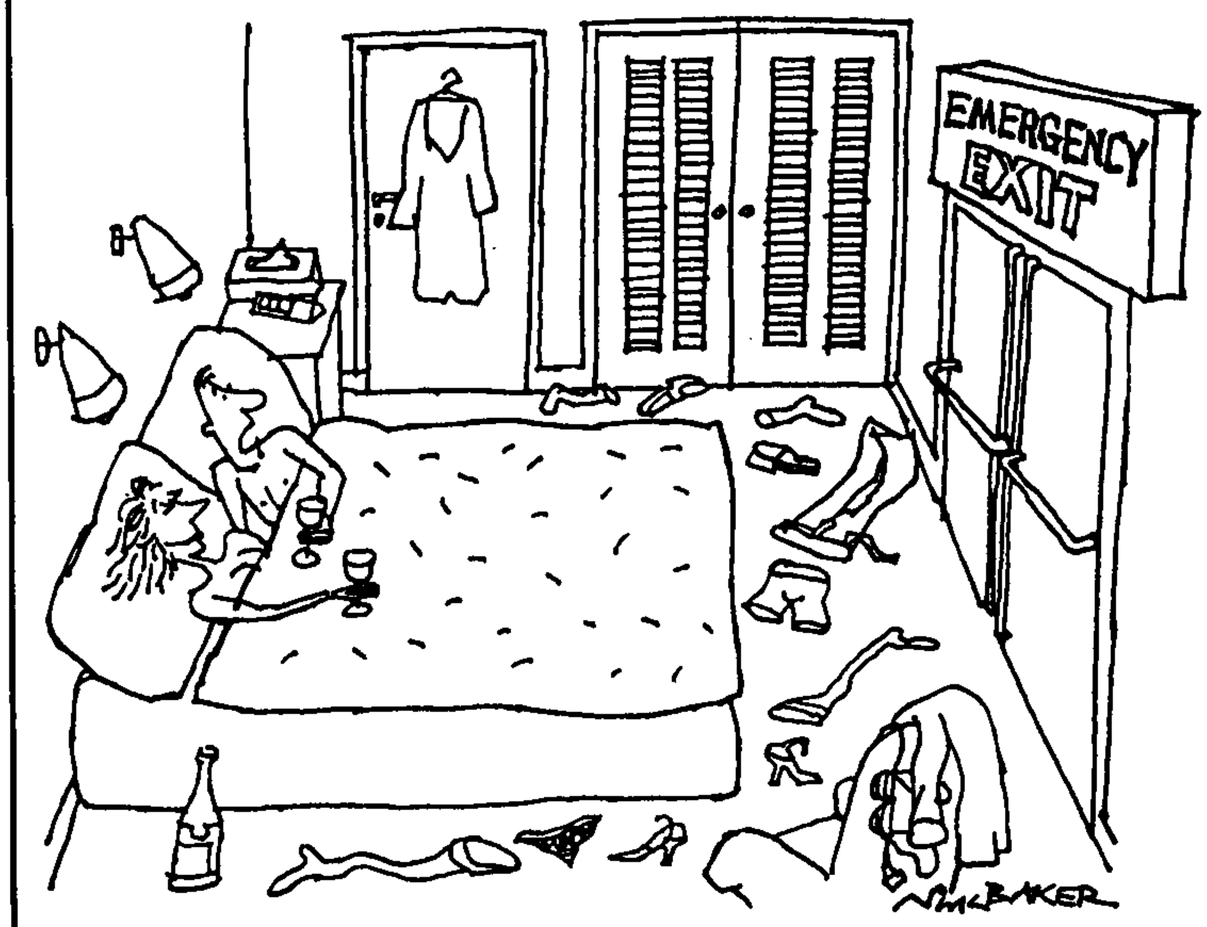
4.05pm Does He Take The Blame?
Programme for the disabled. How can we improve the image of people without a leg to stand on? Guest: Sir Marmalade Gussett, former Chairman of the BBC.

5.30pm I'm Sorry, I Haven't A Clue
A panel of BBC Governors give humorous excuses as to why they let Birt and Hussey get away with it.

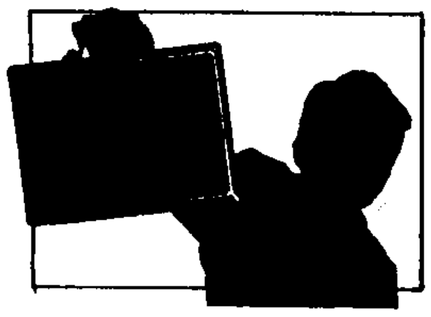
11.15pm Crook At Bedtime
Economics editor Peter Jay pays tribute to his former employer Robert Maxwell — "a man of great moral and physical courage".

11.30pm Shopping Forecast
Various senior members of the BBC shop John Birt — or not, as the case may be.

11.45pm Closedown
of BBC.



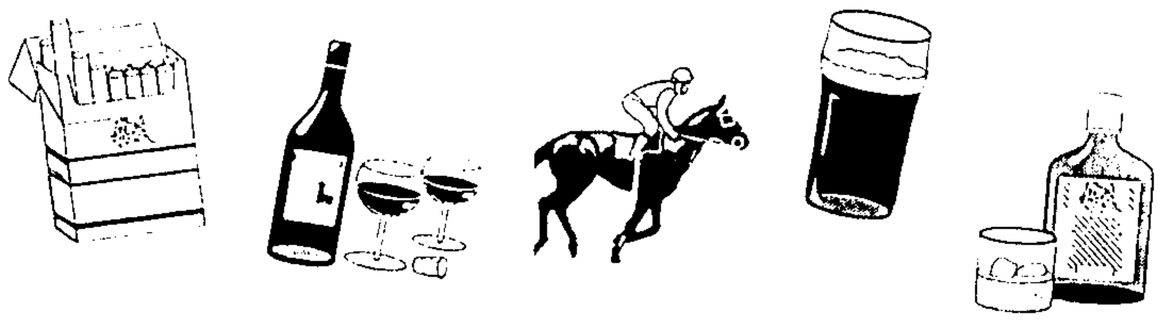
"Does your husband ever come home unexpectedly?"



THE BUDGET

How it affects the average man called Lamont

TODAY'S BUDGET was hailed as a disaster for the typical Chancellor in the street as a series of punitive measures hit directly at his lifestyle and his pocket.



HOW HE LOSES

Fags up No more Raffles or other cheap cigarettes. Increase of at least 10p.

Booze up The average purchase of cheap champagne *or* 3 bottles of claret at Thresher's (proprietor J. Onanugu) will now cost the Chancellor an extra 15p.

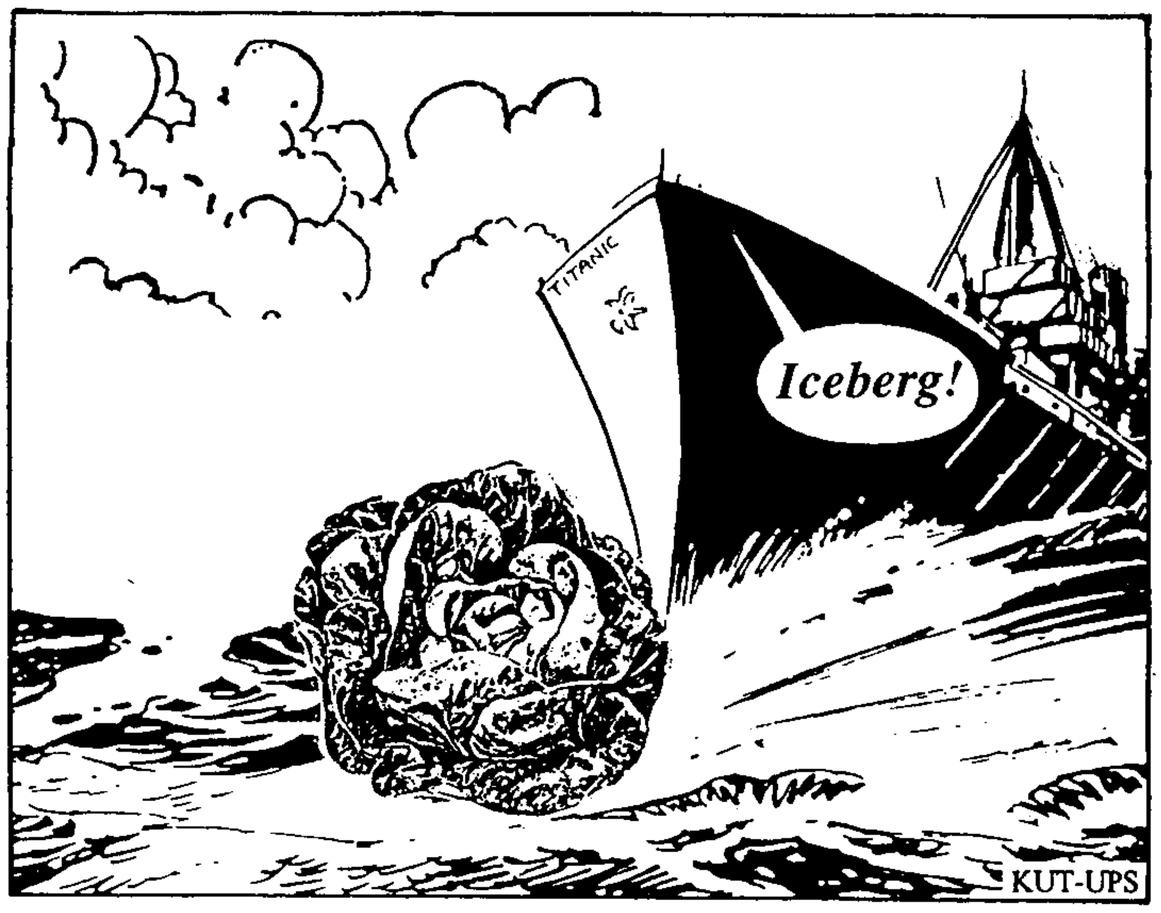
Stamp Duty retained When the Chancellor has to move from a free house (No. 11 Downing Street) and buy somewhere for his retirement, he will have to pay a hefty charge on purchase of over £60,000.

Household bills Heat and light for basements occupied by Miss Whiplash will go up 17.5%. Unless he can get the Treasury to cough up for him.

HOW HE GAINS

Help for jobless When the Chancellor is sacked he will benefit from the community action programme for the long-term unemployable.

The main problem for the Chancellor is that these measures are "a time-bomb" waiting to go off. They effectively mean that it will be 1994 before everyone realises quite how useless he is, and 1995 before he is fired.



NEW WORDS

CAMILLEPAGLIA
n. (Italian). Gibberish; high-flown nonsense involving academic and cultural references. Example: "I have never heard such camillepaglia in all my life."

HUSSEY
v. trans. To hurry through something rather shady in the hope that no one will notice. Example: "The chairman husseyed it through during the tea break."

BOTTOMLEY
adv. In a priggish manner designed to convey the impression that all is going well when one is presiding over a disaster. Example: "She announced the hospital closures very bottomley indeed" (Hansard 1993). Old English *bumley*.

BOTNEY
n. One who remains silent while all around are sucking up to the boss.

RAE
n. A self-satisfied pedagogue who spends his retirement seeking to justify his mistakes. Example: "This is a boring book about education. Let's get a rae to review it."

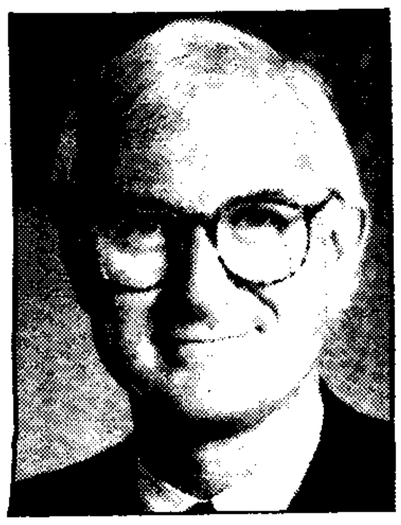
MAASTRICHT
n. Soporific drug designed to send an entire nation to sleep. Example: "I took a couple of Maastricht and was knocked out for five days." Derivation obscure, but probably from Dutch town of same name.

DEGSY
n. Liverpudlian slang. A wide boy, spiv, Jack-the-lad. One who gets away with it. Example: "Our wacker's a reet degsy" (The Collected Poems of Roger McGough).

MEET THE CLINTSTONES - THE PREHISTORIC FIRST FAMILY
GEE HILMA, I HEAR YOU AND BILL MAKE ALL THE DECISIONS TOGETHER!
THE WHITE CAVE
YUP! AND OUR FIRST DECISION IS...
..THAT I DECIDE EVERYTHING
YABBA DABBA DO NOT VERY MUCH!

KINDRED SPIRITS

People who don't like paying tax



John Birt

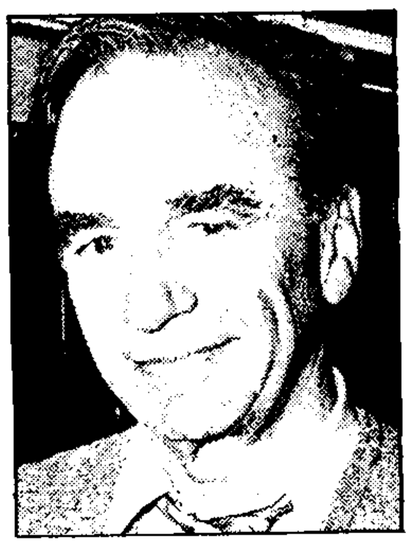
John Birt's tax affairs have become something of a national talking point. John wants the BBC to become more accountable, but John's no fool. He didn't mean himself. He's not going to join the self-unemployed!

Lester Piggott

When it comes to paying taxes, Lester is none too keen. In fact he paid hardly any for years. Which is why he spent time at Her Majesty's pleasure.

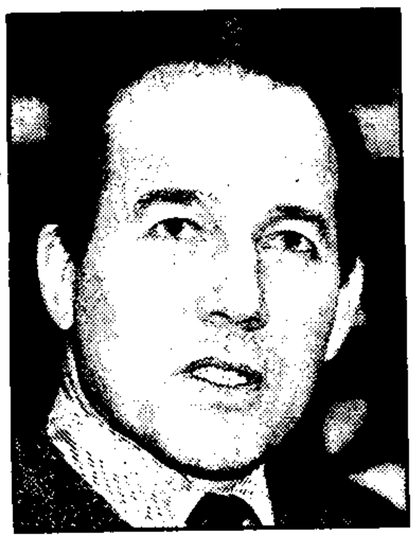
Queen Elizabeth

Talking of whom, Her Majesty has never paid a penny of tax in her life. And, even now that the Revenue has caught up with her, she won't be paying much. As she puts it: "I am a self-employed Director of Liz Windsor Productions Ltd, which provides consultancy services to the Monarchy."



Rupert Murdoch

When it comes to slipping through the tax net, Rupert Murdoch is the undisputed master. An Australian who makes his money in England and who has become an American citizen, Rupert's financial status has baffled the world's top taxmen, leaving him laughing all the way to the Bank of wherever it is.



Andrew Knight

Andrew Knight is Rupert Murdoch's right-hand man, and he can teach his boss a thing or two about avoiding tax! Andrew has an offshore fund in Jersey worth £28 million, so he won't pay any income tax on it. "I am all for taxes," he said. "I take one to lunch every day."

Ken Dodd

Diddyman Ken became well known as "the man who got off" when he was cleared of attempting to evade the taxman. So he shouldn't be in this category at all.

Theatre

Critics acclaim return of Maggie

The Importance Of Being In The ERM

by Lunchtime O'Wilde

(Scene: a drawing room in Downing Street. A young man in glasses is pacing nervously up and down, as if he is expecting an important visitor. There is an imperious knock at the door. Enter LADY THATCHER)

JOHN MAJOR *(for it is he):* Ah, Lady Thatcher. I can explain everything.

DAME MAGGIE: To lose one Commons vote might be counted a misfortune. To lose two makes you look like a twit.

MAJOR: I was only trying to emulate you, Lady Thatcher.

MAGGIE: I see. A case of the unspeakable in full pursuit of the unbeatable.

MAJOR: I hear that poor Lord Ridley has died.

MAGGIE: How could he, after all I did for him?

(Awkward pause)

MAJOR *(offering her a cucumber sandwich):* May I enquire how you are spending your time these days?

DAME MAGGIE: I am reading my memoirs. It is so important to have something really boring to read on the train. Not

that I ever travel by train, you recall.

MAJOR: But I'm going to privatise the trains.

THATCHER: That is the one mistake I never made.

(Hits him with handbag)

MAJOR: A handbag!

(Curtain. For Major)

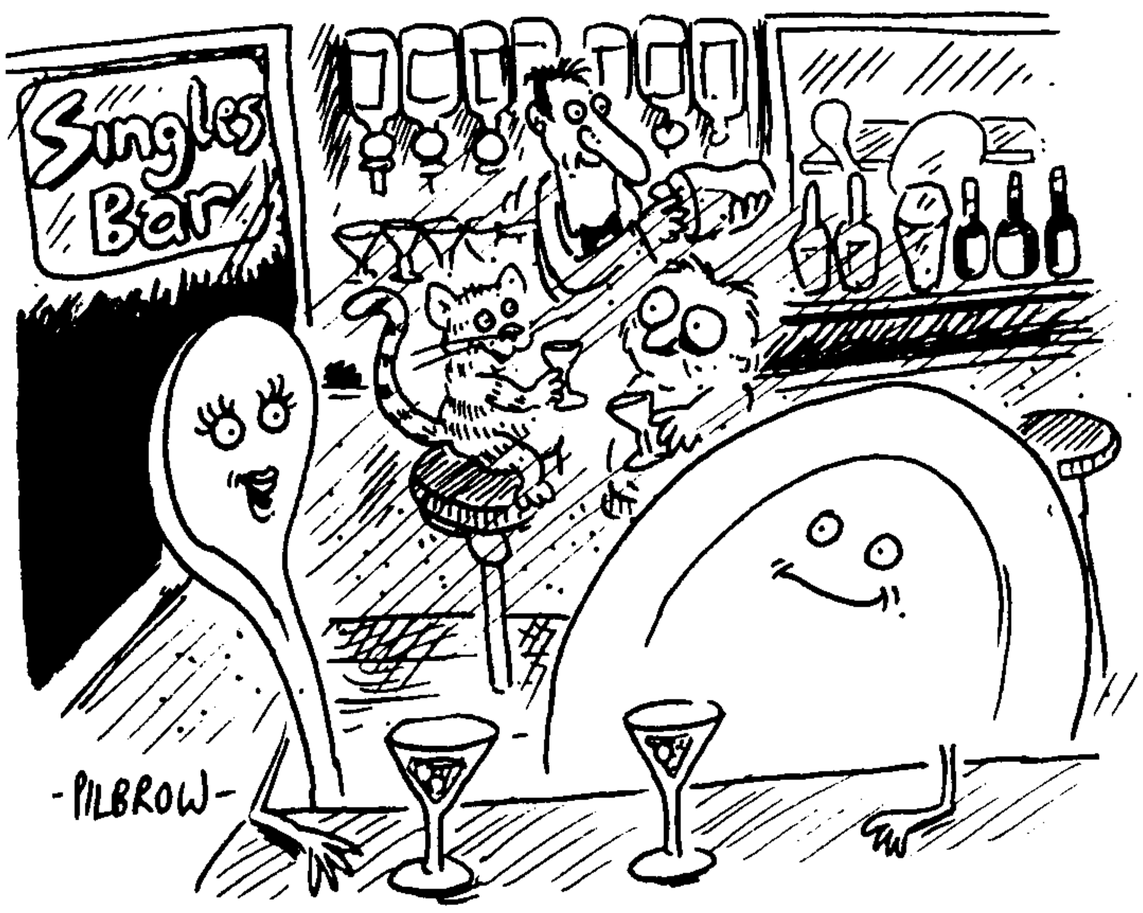
Cast in full

Lady Thatcher **Maggie Smith**

An Ideal Husband **Denis Thatcher**

A Woman of No Importance **Claire Lattimer**

Lady Thatcher's Fan **Charles Moore**



"What a coincidence — I'm in the catering business as well"

TOP HOLLYWOOD STARS SAY 'NO' TO VIOLENCE

by Kim Bashingheroverthehead

TWO of Hollywood's leading actors have joined in the new crusade for a less violent cinema, it was announced last night.

Both 50-year-old Tom and co-star Jerry, 50, have intimated that they may not make any more sequels to their highly successful "Tom and Jerry" movies.

Said Tom: "I now realise that what we as performers do on the screen does have an identifiable effect on the standards of behaviour, especially of the young, in society as a whole. As an artist, I do feel responsible."

His remarks were echoed by his co-star Jerry, who has been involved in what he described himself as "some of the most horrifically violent scenes ever filmed".

He said that he now recoils in horror at one particular scene in which he stuffed a lighted stick of dynamite in Tom's mouth and laughed as it blew up.

Hannibal Lecture

But this was nothing, said Tom, compared with the infamous sequence in *Jerry Gets a Shock* (1957), when Tom administered 2,000 volts to Jerry's brain and then beat his blackened and burnt body repeatedly with a spade until the mouse was totally flat.

"We just took the money and the awards," admitted the shamefaced duo, "but now we are determined to get some publicity along with everyone else. Our next film, which is currently in pre-production, will tell the story of a cat and a mouse who learn to live in harmony across the barriers of species, class and race."

LATE NEWS

MORE HOLLYWOOD IMMORTALS JOIN 'SAY NO' CAMPAIGN

New names that have today publicly pledged their support for Tom and Jerry's stance include Sylvester the Cat, Tweety Pie, Bugs Bunny, the Roadrunner, Wile E. Coyote, Popeye and Postman Pat *(shurely shome mishtake? Ed)*.

(Reuters)

From Mrs Fay Weldon and others

Sir, The BBC is the face of the nation abroad and the mouthpiece of its aspirations at home. It is therefore important that we address the larger questions.

John Birt's tax arrangements were legal, and apparently cleared by Inland Revenue, but he has conceded that on becoming director-general he ought to have joined the staff.

Change in public institutions is always difficult, as jobs are threatened and familiar structures disappear. The director-general is not paid to be popular, but to be effective. He has already proved himself clear-headed, honourable and decisive at a difficult time for the BBC, when its income is falling in real terms and its future uncertain.

In such circumstances it is up to the board of governors to stand by their initial judgment and not encourage or allow John Birt to resign.

Yours faithfully,
FAY WELDON, ANNAN,
HARRY ENFIELD,
ELIZABETH ESTEVE-COLL,
RICHARD EYRE,
GERMAINE GREER,
BOB HOSKINS, PETER JONAS,
ADRIAN NOBLE, DAVID PUTTNAM,
NICHOLAS SEROTA,
JOHN WOODWARD,

The Times 17.3.93

HARRY ENFIELD'S TELEVISION PROGRAMME

(Silly music. Man filling in tax return. It is John Birt. In comes man with funny cap and glasses)

ENFIELD *(for it is he)*: You don't want to do it like that, you want to do it like this. You don't want to be on PAYE, you want to be self-employed. You don't want to resign, you want to stay on.

BIRT: Thank you very much for your support, Mr Enfield. *(Hands him large cheque)*

(Audience laughter. Enter "Loadsamoney")

ENFIELD *(for it is he again)*: I've got Loadsamoney from the BBC! Loadsamoney! *(Waves wad of money)*

(More audience laughter. Old black-and-white film. Enter Mr Grayson and Mr Cholmondeley-Warner)

ENFIELD *(still him)*: Now, do tell us, Mr Cholmondeley-Warner, about this fascinating new fiscal invention to save money on the Revenue.

CHOLMONDELEY-WARNER: Yes, it's very simple, Mr Grayson, and I'm glad you asked. You get yourself an accountant and register yourself as Schedule D!!

(Looks at wrong camera. Audience in hysterics. Enter Lee and Lance)

LEE: He hasn't resigned.

LANCE: I don't believe it. What's all that about? *(Audience paroxysm)*

TIM NICE-BUT-DIM: Awfully nice chap, John Birt!! *(Audience carried out on stretchers)*

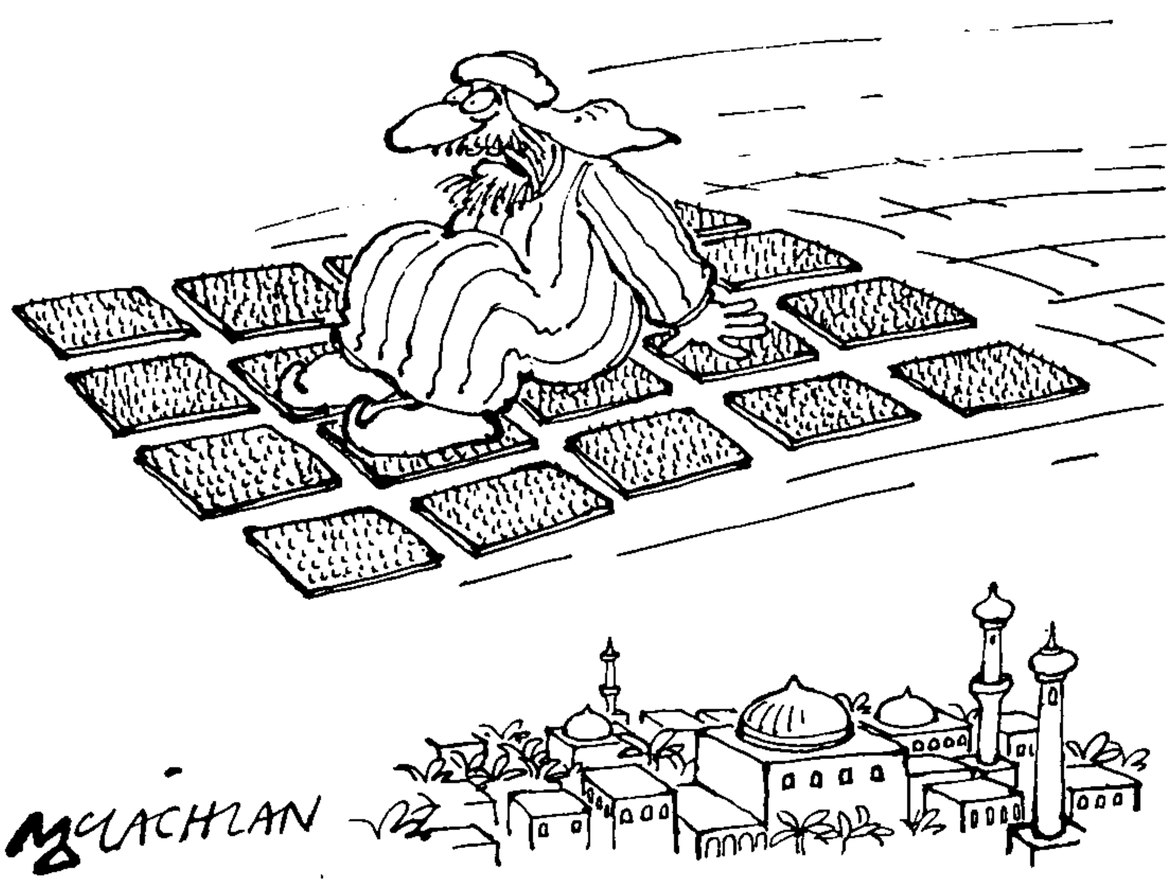
(Enter Old Gits)

OLD GIT *(Marmaduke Hussey, for it is he)*: Bloody Enfield! What's he up to? Writing to The Times and sucking up to John Birt?

(Audience laughter. Enter DJs)

SMASHIE AND NICIE: Birt-tastic!! John-a-mungous!!!!!

(That's enough Enfield. Ed)



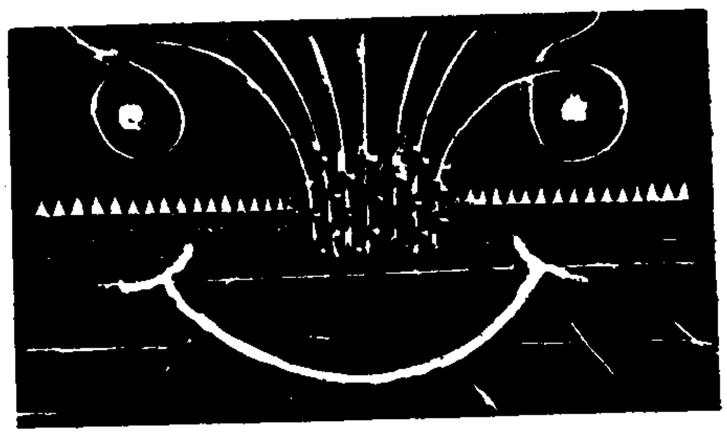
"Bloody flying carpet tiles!"

Oui! It's Provencal Rhyming Slang!

Year in Provence	**Put up le TV licence**
Garlic and beret	**Expensive, very**
Stripy shirt	**Bravo, John Birt!**
John Thaw	**Zut alors!**
Woman in hat	**Honêtement, un peu flat**
Episode un	**Not much fun**
Darling Buds of May	**Funnier, très**
C'est terrible	**Extremely feeble**
Scène avec plumber	**Quel bummer!**
Episode trois	**Merde! 9 more mois!**
C'est le Mistral	**Clichéd et banal**
Episode cinq	**Laughing toute la route to the bank**
Critics didn't rave	**Quelle heure est One Foot in the Grave?**
Episode Douze	**Snooze**

(That's enough. Ed.)

DIARY



GODFREY SMITH

A plump mailbag this week, chums. The quest for the world's most utterly worthless column-filler thunders on. Cheers and thanks aplenty to Mr Charles Smethwick from Tring, Herts, who writes: "Why not, prithee, a few rich tales of our old mate Kipling, Rudyard of that ilk? Two or three of 'em, and you'd have the column filled in no time, much to the pleasure of the Island Race!"

Cracking suggestion, Charlie, for Kippers is indeed a name with which to conjure. I was reminded of this by mates aplenty at the annual chin-wag and tuck-in of The Kipling Society on Tuesday last. Over some first-class nosh, we heard from Professor Geoffrey Leakey of Balliol that The Kip was an inveterate wearer of sensible shoes. "He never went outside without 'em!" the Good Prof informed us over a first-class Port.

I approached Geoffrey after dinner and asked him to explain the vexed mystery of why Kipling was so insistent on quality footwear. "I can only think that it was so that his feet wouldn't get wet!" answered Geoff. Sometimes, it seems, the simplest explanations are also the truest! I hope that clears the matter up for you, Mr C.! Do any other readers wear shoes, perchance — or is it another tradition that is going the way of the penny-farthing and the good old-fashioned roly-poly?

"Is there a God?" asks reader Mr Arnold Petty from Yorks. Well, Mr P., there's a puzzler! You're not the first person who's asked that particular brain-teaser, and I feel sure you won't be the last, but, anyway, here goes!

Yes, Arnie, on balance I'd say there was a God — if only because I've always hoped that there's someone larger than me in this Universe of ours. But others of Our Island Race have felt rather differently, of that there's no denying. That inveterate egghead Bertrand Russell was of the sage opinion that there wasn't a God, and after much to-ing and fro-ing our old friend Sigmund Freud found himself agreeing with Bertie.

But God has been able to muster quite a line-up of supporters for Himself, from our very own Archbish. of C., to that most popular of Poles, Il Papa! They all insist he's a first-class bloke, and a true gent to boot. This is one debate that looks to rage on for some months yet. A magnum of the fizzy stuff will be wending its way to the reader who comes up with the best answer. Let's be hearing from you!

My dictionary definition of the word 'buzzer' says, 'an electrical device, similar to a bell, that makes a buzzing noise'. Just above it, the entry for 'buzzard' reads, 'any of a group of predatory birds of the hawk family, esp. of the genus *butea*, with broad wings well adapted for soaring flight'.

Fascinating what one can find in one's trusty dictionary, particularly if one's short of something to fill the old column! And, as friend Einstein may well have once observed, the dictionary can get one out of some pretty ticklish situations. For example, I'll know now never to mix up a *buzzer* with a *buzzard* — thus saving the old forefinger from a pretty sharp nip from our feathered friend! A bottle of fizz for the reader who thinks of other uses to which a trusty dictionary may be put...

Bumped into my old chum Alexander Solzhenitsyn the other morn, or might have done had he been in town, and I'm delighted to report that he still has that truly magnificent beard for which he was once so famous.

It emerges that Sandy keeps his beard in trim with the occasional visit to his local barber, but otherwise, he says, it looks after itself. Of course, in the old days some of the best of the British Bards were fully-paid-up members of the hairy chin brigade, Tony Trollope, Benjy Disraeli and Charlie Dickens among 'em. But now their numbers seem to be slipping, though my old chum Bill Golding is a notable exception — and a Nobel Prize-winner to boot!

Why the beard, Bill, old bean? Like me, Bill Golding is a devoted reader of this column, so I trust he'll drop me a line to set the record straight on this most hairy of questions. And a bottle of fizz, too, to the reader who comes up with the best ending to the following sentence — 'I think our chum Bill Golding sports a beard because...' But please — no more than twelve words, thank you. Over to you!

A Mr Philip Peters, who hails from Dorking, Surrey, writes a delightful letter. 'If you don't have anything else to fill up your column this week, Godders,' he says, 'then why not shove this letter in?'

Thanks, Phil, old chap — I most certainly will!

Thanks are also due to my inveterate correspondent Mr Malcolm Assington from the windswept metropolis of Torbay, who puts to me that perennial brain-teaser, 'What makes Britain Great'?

By heaven, that's surely one for the little grey cells, Malc! For me, the Great British Banger is something to sing about, and so too, I reckon, are good old Fish and Chips, the Queen Mum, Radio 4, Heinz Baked Beans, the Brussels Sprout and our unique ability to enjoy a damned good belly-laugh at our own expense!

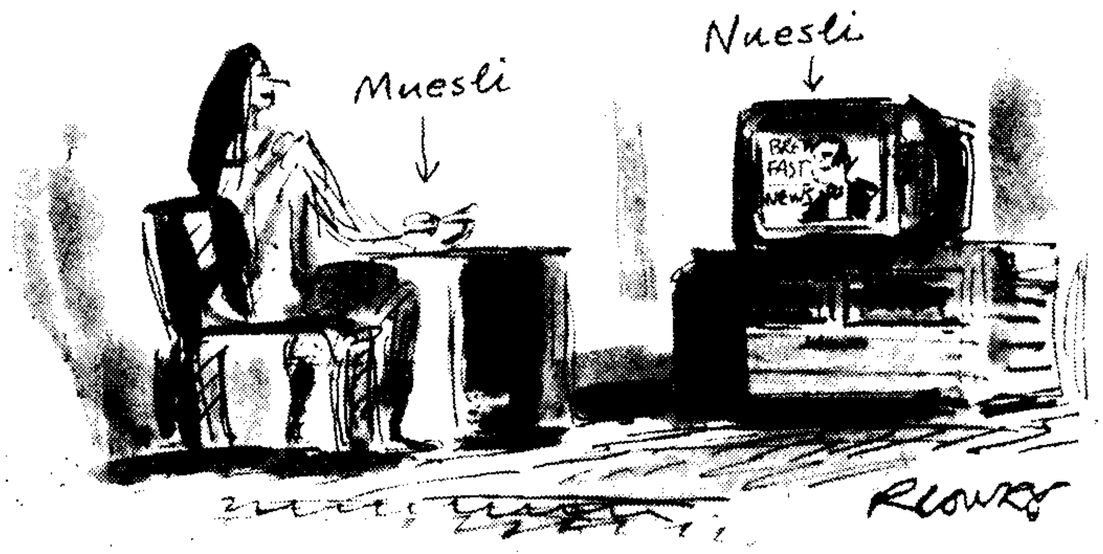
And raise your glasses, if you will, to the Channel Tunnel. 'The *what*?' will be the response on the lips of most readers, so let me fill you in on this most delicious of developments, chums.

Last week at The Trollope Society Dinner, I found myself tucking into some sumptuous scoff with a Mr Andrew Torrington, who, it turned out, is a bigwig in the building of the Channel Tunnel. I'd never heard of the blessed thing me'self, so I begged Andy to tell me more, and fascinating stuff it proved to be.

Seems that for the last few years the blighters have been building a tunnel 'twixt Britain and France, the Brits busily burrowing from one end, the Frogs from t'other. Before many moons have passed, the intrepid traveller will thus be able to journey from London to Gay Paree without once setting foot on water! Sounds interesting!

Blimey! If that doesn't constitute a Great British achievement, then I'd like to know what does! Yes it was news to me, and to most of you too, I'll hazard. Trust the Island Race to keep such a smashing project under our collective hat for so long! Still, it's something to sing about in these dark times — and that can't be bad!

Finally, the usual bottle of the fizzy stuff to the reader who writes this column for me. Replies shouldn't be less than eight hundred words long — and I promise to print each one! Cheers!



WE REGRET

Wednesday's and Thursday's edition of the Athens News was flawed by two critical mispellings of article titles. On Wednesday's paper "Jackson Feasts for Haitians", should have been "Jackson Fasts for Haitians". On Thursday's,"Philosphers Needed to tell EC what to Do About Yugoslavia", should have read: "Philosophers Needed to tell EC what to Do About Yugoslavia". Both articles appeared on page five.

Literary Review

Too many Cooksons...

The Year of the Virgins
Catherine Cookson
(Bantam, £14.99)
The House of Women
Catherine Cookson
(Corgi, £4.99)

CATHERINE COOKSON is the last remnant of working heavy industrial plant in the North-east. She's been churning out books for over 40 years, and the sales have never stopped rising.

She's produced over 80 titles and sold more than 90 million copies. These two new ones each became the bestselling novel — one in hardback, the other in paperback — as soon as they were published.

And, owing to her unparalleled paup-appeal, even more people read her than buy her. The true register of her success is the Public Lending Right returns, in which she invariably scores far more loans than any other writer. In one year, no less than 35 of all the 100 most borrowed titles were by Cookson.

The greatest milch-cow in publishing is now 86 years old and has been in poor health for some time. Her publishers, Transworld, are not unnaturally concerned — so much so that they have begun to think about ways of maintaining product-continuity beyond the grave.

No publisher can see why an established line should go out of production just because its author has been selfish enough to expire. Various ways round the problem have been tried. The late Virginia Andrews has been trademarked: her ghost continues to turn out bestsellers, successfully flogged as "The New Virginia Andrews" — one of these fabrications is in the bestseller list now. The late Alastair Maclean, on the other hand, has simply been posthumously impersonated by "Alastair MacNeil", with both names appearing on the cover, the former in larger type than the latter, a ploy guaranteed to confuse the open-mouthed dimwits who buy such books.

Transworld has gone for the relatively tasteful option, launching a Catherine Cookson Award for new novelists. The first winner, Valerie Wood, is to be announced later this year. She gets £10,000. Transworld gets a Cookson-lookalike which it can legitimately publish with the words CATHERINE COOKSON blazoned large on the cover — a first step to being free from irritating dependency on the woman herself, immortalising her mighty brand-name.

Yet with any luck this little scheme will fail. Many bestsellers and would-be bestsellers are synthetic, cynically written down by greedy hacks. Cookson's aren't like this at all. They really are as mad as hell. They obsessively rehearse terrible scenes and deranged longings. They pound away at painful places.

They're Tyneside's answer to Greek tragedy.

The Year of the Virgins contains fantastic slaughter. Fat and crazy Catholic Winifred Coulson has a loveless marriage with husband Dan, who's doggedly knocking off Maggie the cook in their Tyneside mansion. They have three adult children in the house, mentally retarded Stephen, adopted Joe and young Don, of whom Winifred is insanely and sexually possessive.

And now young Don is getting married to young Annette. Whoops! 'Appen, as he drives off from the wedding, he's paralysed and rendered incontinent in a car crash. By heck though, that ain't all. 'Appen, he's already impregnated his bride beforehand. Winifred goes bananas when she finds out and is carted off to the loony bin for shock treatment. 'Appen she escapes though, comes back home, catches Dan and the cook hard at it and batters everyone in the house to within an inch of their lives with a plank of wood. 'Appen at this point almost every character is in hospital. "What had come upon them? It was like a curse. But it was no curse, it was simply mother-love, twisted mother-love."

But all's well that ends well. Winifred dies of exposure. Annette has the baby, saintly paraplegic Don kicks the bucket in Catholic cheer, and adopted Joe reveals that he's always had the horn for Annette himself. She confirms that she has long had the hots for him too. And now the deck's been cleared. Whahey!

All of this is supposed to happen in the 1960s. The period detail is thin and implausible, but it doesn't matter. The story is told in a sort of continuous breathlessness, the over-explicit dialogue oriented by incessant use of the characters' names. Cookson shows little linguistic awareness but she has a fanatical grasp of structure, always dutifully telling you where people are at any time, and what they're doing. It's simultaneously quite unreal and peculiarly convincing because, improbable as the characters are, Cookson is committed to them. In fact, of course, they are all *her*.

For Cookson's own often-told story is at least as extraordinary as her novels. She was born illegitimate in Jarrow and, until told the truth by other children, believed her alcoholic mother was her sister and her grandparents were her parents; she was brought up in great poverty but saved enough as a laundry manageress to buy a large boarding house; she was childless but suffered four miscarriages; and she endured a severe mental breakdown, which took 10 years to recover from, before she began writing in her forties.

These events and the pain they caused are what fuel her writing, reappearing again and again in very slightly different guises. Her current paperback, *The House of Women*, offers yet another mad matriarch, more infidelity and attempted murder, another lover who waits years for his beloved and, for good measure, a strong dose of father-daughter incest. All this is set off by an accidental pregnancy (Cookson's whole oeuvre depends on contraceptive failure).

The emotional pressure behind this writing is unmistakeable. Cookson is a much better novelist than those — like Melvyn Bragg and Julie Burchill — who have tried to fake their way into bestsellerdom. All those stock scenes may be imitated — but the manic intensity is not so easily faked. Her publishers are right to be anxious about her health. They don't make them like her any more, what with the Welfare State and all. Thank heaven it's being dismantled! Literature can only benefit.

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

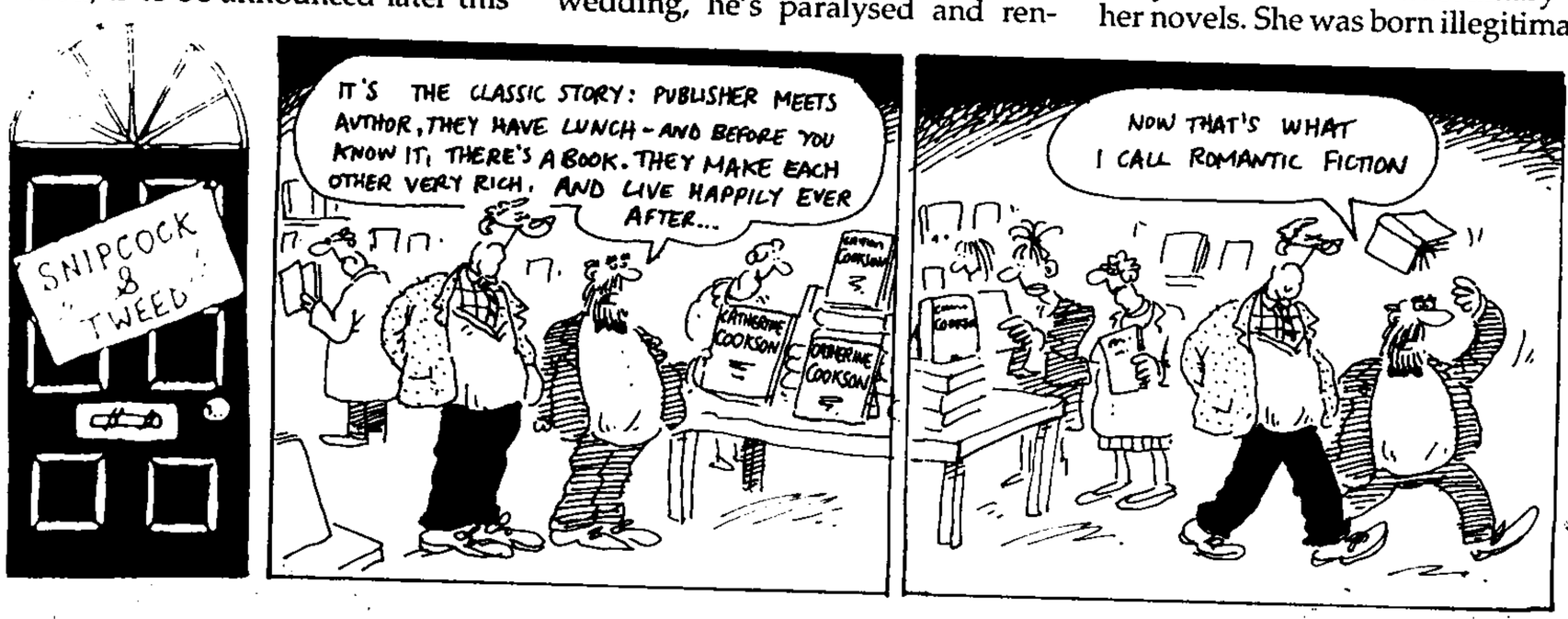
☐ STAND BY for the opposite of a blockbuster book by Seumas Milne, an Arthur Scargill sycophant who writes about trade union affairs for the *Graunaid*. Scargill was incandescent with rage when he discovered that Paul Routledge, the teetotal *Observer* hack who tormented him years ago when employed by *The Times*, was writing an unauthorised biography of him. Milne, who has written many articles pointing out that Scargill is as pure as driven snow, has now been commissioned to write a rival biography, which should be on the streets around the same time as Routledge's masterpiece.

The theme of Milne's work is that Scargill was the victim of a conspiracy involving MI5, MI6, the CIA, the KGB, Margaret Thatcher and the late pensions crook Robert Maxwell. Roger Windsor, the former NUM chief executive who spilled the beans to ex-*Daily Mirror* industrial editor Terry "mine's a pint" Pattinson, will be exposed as a spy planted by the intelligence services.

This will come as a rude shock to Windsor, still counting his *Mirror* money in a hideout in France. For Windsor was selected, interviewed and recruited by none other than Arthur Scargill. Surely Milne cannot be suggesting that Scargill himself is a spy?

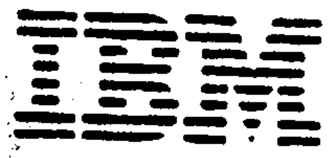
■ *JULIE BURCHILL's massively hyped new novel has an unfortunate title, given its recent performance in the Bestsellers List. Having entered the charts for one week, No Exit immediately left again. It is to be hoped that Sir Christopher Sinclair Stevenson doesn't feel he has wasted all that money.*

'Bookworm'


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
IT'S THE CLASSIC STORY: PUBLISHER MEETS AUTHOR, THEY HAVE LUNCH - AND BEFORE YOU KNOW IT, THERE'S A BOOK. THEY MAKE EACH OTHER VERY RICH. AND LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER...
CATHERINE COOKSON
CATHERINE COOKSON
NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL ROMANTIC FICTION

HEALTH

The joy of Wessex



THE REVIVAL of the row over the Wessex Regional Health Authority's flushing down the drain of some £60m of public money on a new RISP computer system has come at a bad time for the Tory Party.

The row, which caused quite a din when it was first publicised in 1986, is not just about a technical error over a computer system. At its root is the very deep penetration of wealthy and powerful Tory loyalists into the National Health Service — a penetration which gives a rather different interpretation to the famous assurance of Margaret Thatcher that the NHS is "safe with us". The publicity in 1986 was started by angry competitors for the Wessex computer contract, including ICL and a company called DEC. The DEC tender to provide the RHA with a comprehensive computer system was the lowest. It appeared to have been accepted when suddenly the tendering rules were changed and re-tenders sought for a different system. The re-tenders were pressed on the authority by the consulting arm of the blue-blooded American-owned accountants Arthur Andersen, who were advising the authority on how to deal with the contract. By amazing chance the only company in place with a bid for the newly-sought computer were a consortium consisting of Arthur Andersen and IBM. To the outrage and fury of the other contractors this consortium won the contract.

All sorts of important people were involved. Chief lobbyist for Arthur Andersen was Lord (Patrick) Jenkin, a Thatcher loyalist who had been Secretary of State for Social Services, so knew what he was talking about. The chairman of the Wessex Regional Authority at the time was a Tory academic, another Thatcher loyalist, Prof Sir Bryan Thwaites. Sir Bryan, knighted by Thatcher in 1986, had been appointed to the chairmanship of the authority in 1982.

When Sir Bryan became chairman, another very loyal Tory was already in place on the authority. He was the late Jim Foster, who had been appointed to Wessex RHA in 1980 — almost as soon as the Thatcher government took office. Foster was at the time a main board director of IBM. He was not at all embarrassed by any possible conflict of interest, and lobbied relentlessly for his own company to get the computer contract. He was joined in that endeavour by Anthony Cleaver, the new chief executive of IBM, who the previous year had joined Business in the Community, a clutch of top Tory businessmen with a community conscience specially favoured by Thatcher. Another, more seasoned member of Business in the Community was Sir Edwin Nixon, who was at Cambridge with Bryan Thwaites and at the time of the Wessex contract was chairman of IBM. (He is now deputy chairman of the National Westminster Bank.)

The appointment of big business Tory loyalists like Jim Foster to high positions in the National Health Service was part of a government plan to inject the dynamism and thrust of private enterprise into the rotten old state carcase of the NHS. In 1985, the year before the Wessex contract was awarded, Leonard Peach, director of personnel and corporate affairs at IBM, was seconded from IBM (which still paid his salary) to the management board of the NHS. In 1986, the year of the Wessex contract, Peach was promoted to chief executive of the management board, perhaps the most powerful position in the biggest health care organisation in the world. IBM was still paying his salary. Peach, who had the rank of second permanent secretary at the Department of Health and Social Security, stayed on until 1989 when he got his knighthood and went back to IBM. He is now chairman of the Police Complaints Authority, and may have had something to do with the recent appointment of Beryl Wallis, who joined the Authority recently from IBM, and was responsible for the PCA's spectacular whitewash of the case of Gary Mills and Tony Poole (see last *Eye*).

When IBM/Andersen won the contract, Ann Clwyd, Labour MP for Cynon Valley, and other MPs started asking questions. They got a series of delayed and inaccurate replies from the Secretary of State for Social Services, Norman Fowler, and his Minister of State for Health, Tony Newton. A critical auditor's report was quietly buried, and all Tories in the know hoped that the whole controversy would die down once the magnificent RISP computer was up and running.

Alas, the computer was a total disaster, leading from one extravagance and incompetence to the next. By the time Sir Bryan Thwaites retired in 1988, to be replaced by another Tory loyalist, Robin Buchanan, it was clear that RISP was going to cost the NHS a lot of money without providing any real advantage to the sick and needy in Wessex. Buchanan, however, pressed on relentlessly with the project. He was assisted by Harry Tuffill, yet another Thatcherite seconded, at Buchanan's request, to the Wessex regional RHA from... you've guessed it, IBM. Buchanan and Tuffill persevered with the RISP project until it was finally ditched (by a new regional manager) in 1990. Buchanan, who was knighted last year, is still chairman of the RHA.

The campaign by *Computer Weekly*, *The Independent* and John Denham, the new Labour MP for Southampton Itchen, to re-open the scandal has had considerable success. The matter is shortly to be discussed at length (and perhaps even exposed) by the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee. The witnesses to that committee have not yet been named, but what could be more embarrassing for the government than if they included the current chairman of the Tory Party, Sir Norman Fowler, secretary of state at the time of the original contract, and his predecessor as party chairman and present Governor of Hong Kong, His Excellency Sir Christopher Patten, for years a close political colleague in Bath, which Patten represented in Parliament until he was chucked last year, of Sir Robin Buchanan?

WEST MIDLANDS RHA

Patience charter

THE buffoons running Britain's biggest health authority seem to be weeding themselves out as the official story of their multi-million pound cock-ups slowly emerges.

West Midlands regional health authority has finally published a series of audit reports damning both past and present staff. Many of the reports have already been revealed in the *Eye*, and the authority's sacked chairman, failed businessman and Tory party member Sir James Ackers, has now been summoned before the parliamentary public accounts committee for an unprecedented *second* time to explain the mess.

The committee might like to ask how and where Ackers and his managers took their decisions. What could explain district auditor John Sherring's scathing remarks about incompetent management over the £8 million spent on unusable computers, the £3 million spent on management consultants who hired houses and planes, and the collapse of two computer companies set up by the RHA?

Managing director Stuart Fletcher chose the day the reports were published to announce his own resignation for "a better job". While in South Birmingham district health authority — hurriedly merged with Central Birmingham by Ackers, who wanted to knock down its hospitals and sell the sites to raise cash for a giant new one — finance director Gareth Jones is now on "indefinite leave".

Ackers had hoped his £500 million "Building a Healthy Birmingham" plan would be his everlasting monument. Thirteen hospitals were to be demolished to finance massive expansions of just two or three, which would become superb privatisation prospects. But plummeting land values mean the scheme can never work, even though hospitals have already started to close. Perhaps the empty vandalised buildings will be Ackers's everlasting monument.

NUCLEAR SAFETY

Ha Ha Harwell

PEOPLE living near the Atomic Weapons Establishment's warhead factory at Aldermaston, Berkshire, have further cause to fear for their safety once the private Hunting-Brae consortium takes over the running of the plant under a seven-year contract on 1 April.

The lamentable safety record of the group's construction specialist, Brown & Root, (*Eye* 814) is more than matched by that of the supposed nuclear expert in the triumvirate, AEA Technology (formerly the UK Atomic Energy Authority), which has regularly polluted the environment in and around the site of its Harwell laboratory in Oxfordshire since the 1950s.

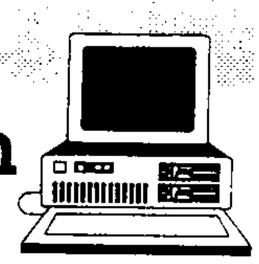
AEA's environmental abuses there include the illegal dumping of dangerous chemical and radioactive wastes in a gravel pit at nearby Sutton Courtenay; the poisoning of a local aquifer (Thames Water had to close down local boreholes at Blewbury and install a new supply at a cost of £100,000); and releasing substantial quantities of radioactive tritium gas into the atmosphere on at least two occasions.

More worrying still is AEA's apparent immunity from prosecution for these offences. All the regulators involved seem scared to act. The Oxford county council's waste disposal authority merely granted the company a retrospective licence to cover the illegal dumping. The national rivers authority declined to prosecute over the groundwater contamination, leaving AEA to reach an accommodation with Thames. And now it appears a threatened prosecution by the nuclear installations inspectorate (NII) over the latest tritium release will collap

AEA is due to appear before Didcot magistrates on 16 April to face four charges arising from the incident. But Nick Hance, AEA's abrasive press officer at Harwell, has been telling anyone who asks that the company will strike a deal with the NII to avoid a court appearance.

COMPUTERS

Soft(ware) in the head



IF COMPUTERS can't be trusted to look after the tremendously important question of money (cf the £275 million Stock Exchange computer cock-up), should the safety of a nuclear power station be left to a *discredited* system?

Yes, according to Nuclear Electric, which is sticking with software that has been rejected by the people who invented it because it is too unreliable.

In doing so, Nuclear Electric is swimming against the tide. The Stock Exchange scrapped its computer system after a 12-year trial period, and the London ambulance service abandoned its machine after the death of several patients — proving, tragically, that computers are only as clever as the thickwits who program them.

There have been other famous cock-ups: the Inland Revenue's computer was incompatible with that at the department of social security; and British Nuclear Fuels found that its computer forgot to close the door of a radioactive chamber. At Nuclear Electric, meanwhile, a software designer lost his job for saying that he was worried about his own safety system at Nuclear Electric's power stations.

Despite this, we are now to witness the commissioning of the world's first nuclear power station that relies on computer software for control — software invented by the French and rejected by them as unreliable. Nuclear Electric thinks it is acceptable for us, and has installed it at Sizewell B, Britain's first pressurised water reactor. It is due to be commissioned next year if the nuclear installations inspectorate can be persuaded to give it a certificate.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Give us a Bell

THERE was a flurry of activity following our story in the last *Eye* about Crescent Petroleum, the international oil company which unsuccessfully sued an *Observer* journalist for libel.

An early-day motion in the Commons criticised the "disgraceful and disloyal conduct" of *Observer* editor Donald Trelford in failing to help his contributor defend the case against Crescent — "a company which until the invasion of Kuwait had intimate links with Saddam Hussein's regime". Labour MP Robin Cook then asked Michael Heseltine to investigate Crescent and its owner, the Iraqi-born Hamid Jafar — whose brother is head of Saddam Hussein's nuclear weapons programme.

Whereupon Lowe Bell Communications, the company run by Margaret Thatcher's former PR man Tim Bell, sprang into action on Crescent's behalf. One of Bell's staff, Stephen Sherbourne (himself a former political adviser to Lady Thatcher), faxed the *Eye* a bizarre statement claiming that Crescent was "the victim of a campaign of smear and innuendo". It may seem odd that prominent Thatcherites should act for a company which enjoyed "intimate links" with Iraq until shortly before the invasion of Kuwait; but in view of the Thatcher government's own cosy commercial relations with Saddam Hussein in the late 1980s, perhaps it isn't so surprising.

Lowe Bell's statement said that Crescent had taken legal action to "protect its good name" and "welcomes the apologies published by various newspapers, including... the *Observer*". In fact no word of apology has appeared in the *Observer*. Donald Trelford did apologise in a letter to Hamid Jafar last year, but since the letter was marked "Strictly Private and Confidential" it can hardly be said to have been "published".

Odder still, the statement indignantly denied a number of allegations which had not actually been made by the *Eye* or anyone else: "It has been alleged or implied that Crescent Petroleum was or is owned by the Government of Iraq. This is not true. It has been alleged or implied that Crescent Petroleum is somehow controlled by the Government of Iraq. This is not true..."

Who has alleged or implied such things? A Lowe Bell spokeswoman, Georgie Gibbs, confessed that she did not know. What was the evidence that Crescent had been subject to a campaign of smear and innuendo?

"The use of the word 'campaign' I can't explain," she replied.

The statement also insisted that it is "not true" that "Crescent Petroleum has commercial relations with Iraq." It neglected, however, to mention that this has not always been the case. In 1989, only a year before Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, Hamid Jafar and Crescent agreed a joint venture with the Ministry of Industry and Military Manufacture in Baghdad, "for the purpose of buying interests in international petroleum refining, marketing and Petrochemical assets outside of the Republic of Iraq". A letter to Hamid Jafar from Lt Gen Amir Al-Saadi of the Iraqi government, dated 14 May 1989, authorised Crescent to contact the owners of foreign petrol companies "in order to discuss and negotiate the potential purchase or participation of the Joint Venture in such companies" and to agree with them "the terms for provision of Iraqi crude oil to such assets on a long term basis in support of such transactions".

Bearing this in mind, we asked Lowe Bell whether it wasn't disingenuous merely to issue a denial that Crescent Petroleum has commercial relations with Iraq. Presumably Lowe Bell is aware of Crescent's record? The hapless spokeswoman said that she knew nothing, but "somebody more sensible will come back to you". An hour later Lowe Bell sent us a brief fax: "Crescent Petroleum does not wish to comment on any questions from *Private Eye*."

INDIAN ARMS

A backhanded compliment

THE Curse of Gnome struck two weeks ago when, amid a deafening silence in the western media, the Indian defence minister, Sharad Pawar, was sacked.

The official version of events was that Pawar was moved "to bring political stability" as the new chief minister of the troubled state of Maharashtra. But the truth is that Pawar was dismissed because of the involvement of his intermediaries in the soliciting of commission payments to win lucrative arms deals.

Last June the *Eye* revealed that a secret court session was convened in Geneva relating to the discovery of bank accounts in the city held on behalf of various Indians, including the late Rajiv Gandhi. The Indian government applied to the court to discover the degree to which its politicians and senior civil servants had been bribed by defence contractors.

Now Indian sources have confirmed that the *Eye* story (796) was brought to the attention of the prime minister, no less. That provoked a chain of events leading to Pawar's sacking.

Following the Curse of Gnome, one company that may well curse Pawar's departure is British Aerospace, which is keen to sell its aged Hawk trainers to the Indian air force. The task may now be that much harder.

LONDON TRANSPORT

Aldwych lang syne...

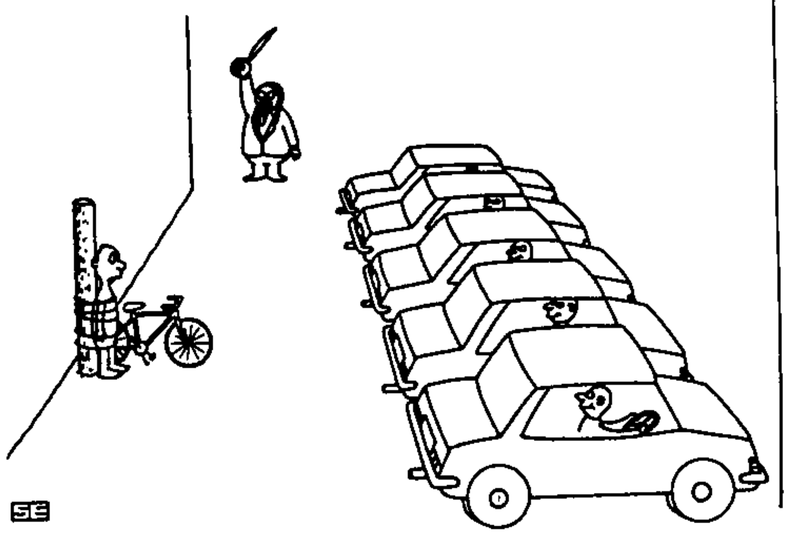
CLOSING branch lines doesn't just happen in far flung rural areas: a small but useful sliver of London's Piccadilly line — from Holborn to Aldwych — is to be axed.

London Underground wants to close Aldwych station because its lifts are worn out and it doesn't have £3 million to replace them. Apparently the station isn't worth saving, despite its 900 peak hour journeys daily and the fact that it could be even more useful if it ran all day.

Transport pressure groups in the capital believe Aldwych is the thin end of a wedge. Mornington Crescent, on the Northern line, is also under threat, and campaigners are fighting the closure with a petition and letters.

One plan for the short Aldwych shuttle would have been to extend it to Waterloo, providing a useful link from the northern suburbs to the new international terminal. But that would require vision. Instead, losing the Aldwych link will cause commuters considerable hassle, for even though it is run by London Underground, it is more reliable than the erratic bus services up on top which are hampered by daily traffic snarl-ups.

With bus deregulation looming, moving around the capital will only get worse: any registered bus route can be dropped at 42 days' notice, though in practice services will disappear overnight if a bus company goes bust.



CULT CORNER

The life and death of Mr Motivala

MYSTERY still surrounds the death of a father of three who feared he might be attacked because of his fierce criticism of the "church" of Scientology.

The body of 38-year-old Khushroo "Chris" Motivala was found hanging from the loft of his Greenford home last September. An inquest last week heard that, despite allegations he had been murdered and that his death was out of character, there was no evidence anybody else was involved. Hammersmith coroner Mr Paul Burton recorded an open verdict.

Mr Motivala's fight against the cult began after his live-in girlfriend Ruth Turk joined the church. He too dabbled briefly, and together they went on the Scientology cruise ship Freewinds, where he took the cult's "communication course" and "purification rundown".

But Mr Motivala found the courses useless and objected to his girlfriend's deeper involvement. Eventually they split up. He suspected she had spent more than £16,000 on Scientology courses, some of which he thought had come from their courier business which subsequently ran into difficulties and was sold. It was a claim Miss Turk denied.

Mr Motivala began a battle for custody of their three children fearing they too would become members of the cult. He embarked on a campaign to expose the church but became increasingly worried about his own safety. He had many arguments with the cult's staff at its London "Celebrity Centre" in Tottenham Court Road where Ruth Turk had attended courses, and with senior staff at its East Grinstead headquarters.

He began building up information on the cult to use in his fight to retain custody of his daughters, and in the months before his death threatened to sue the movement for the return of money which he and Ruth Turk had spent on worthless courses.

Shortly before his death he met journalists in an effort to expose what he saw as the cult's evils. At the meeting, at which journalists thought he had a bodyguard, he said he feared he might be attacked. He claimed the cult had told him that if he continued to campaign against them they would make sure he would never see his children again.

During his brief involvement with the cult he had undergone some auditing sessions at which new recruits are encouraged to reveal all their past misdemeanours. He was also afraid the cult might use the information in his files against him during the forthcoming custody battle.

His campaigning became so intensive the cult issued him with a "non enturbulation order" warning him to stop his anti-Scientology behaviour and his negative attitude towards them. Failure to comply would lead to him being declared a "suppressive person" and an enemy of the church and someone who, according to its founder L. Ron Hubbard's own edicts, could be "tricked, lied to or utterly destroyed".

The court heard that he never met representatives of the cult alone and on one occasion he took a friend along to act as "minder". It was also told he kept a large knife by the front door in case of attack by members of the cult. His girlfriend said: "He made a point of harassing the Scientologists. He was always afraid there would be an attack on him."

Friends were astounded by his death and none could understand it. His employer said he was in good spirits at the time he died because his lawyers had told him he stood a good chance of getting custody of the children. He would, he said, be astounded if Mr Motivala had taken his own life as he would, effectively, have been conceding everything that he had fought for.

After hearing of his fears for his safety, police initially treated the case as suspicious. They carried out tests to see if he had been poisoned or drugged before being hanged but were unable to find anything to suggest anyone else was involved in his death.

In the City

ASIL NADIR appears to be heading down a medical road last travelled by one Ernest Saunders and in similar company. The former Polly Peck chairman is said to be suffering from severe depression. So much so that his lawyers say they are unable to obtain instructions from him.

Well facing fraud and theft charges involving more than £150 million can do that to you, even to such a resilient character as the one time Turkish Delight. No doubt Nadir's view of the future has not been improved by the continuing Scotland Yard investigation into certain events regarding the possible outcome of these charges.

But the immediate impact of Nadir's latest problem could mean a lengthy delay if not indefinite postponement of the trial set for September.

Nadir's lawyers Pannone, Blackburn are thankfully no strangers to such personal problems for their clients. They took over the defence of former Guinness chairman Saunders when he was emerging from a similar depressive state. He not only recovered from that but also became the first man to defeat Alzheimer's Disease. So there is hope yet.

THE recent report by Professor Michael Levi into fraud trials points up one of the manifest failures of the supposed brave new world of fraud prosecution ushered in by the creation of the Serious Farce Office. In his wide-ranging review of the problems of prosecuting City fraud Lord Roskill recommended sanctions be imposed on defence lawyers for withholding information as to the outline of their case. This was ignored.

So it is the SFO which takes the heat for its mistakes or failed prosecutions. But too little attention is paid to the role of the defence or the refusal of judges to punish misbehaviour as Roskill recommended.

A classic example was the meek acceptance by Mr Justice Turner of the sudden production by Thomas Ward during his recent trial of a letter he claimed to have written in August 1986 regarding the £3 million received from Guinness which had been given temporary shelter in Ernest Saunders' Swiss bank account. Ward had never disclosed the existence of this letter in the pre-trial hearings. No mention of it had been made by his lawyers even at the start of the trial. The authenticity of the letter was vigorously disputed by the SFO who produced a witness, flown over by Concorde at the taxpayer's expense, who stated that one of the US bank accounts mentioned in Ward's supposed contemporary letter had not existed at that time.

Just what impact the letter had on the jury that acquitted Ward of stealing the £5.2 million he was paid by Guinness — illegally as the civil courts had already held but which the jury was not told — cannot be measured. But it probably did not hurt him.

But imagine if the SFO had suddenly confronted Ward in the witness box with a similar document which it had not disclosed. The defence, quite rightly, would have called for a mistrial on grounds of prosecutorial misconduct. The SFO has already lost at least one case for non-disclosure of material evidence.

Yet in the case of Thomas Ward who deliberately withheld information there was no similar sanction. Mr Justice Turner could have stopped the proceedings (as he no doubt would have been forced to do by the defence if the SFO had been the guilty party) and ordered a retrial on the basis of Ward's behaviour. Ward, lest we forget, is a lawyer. But no. Instead he merely bemoaned the use of "ambush" evidence without taking any action against Ward or his lawyers. The Ward post-mortems therefore were all about another SFO flop not the con trick Ward had pulled with impunity.

For fraud trials to work effectively there must be robust judges of the style found in US Federal courts who make sure that they not the mouthpieces in front of them run the trial. (Whether that means being as robust as Mr Justice Laws who has reduced the complexities of the collapse of the Levitt Group to one charge of fraudulent trading is debatable. That decision may be appealed by the SFO.) And that means judges prepared to ignore the old boy network and punish former fellow QCs and defence lawyers who do not play to the same rules they insist apply to the SFO.

MEANWHILE there is growing speculation concerning the impending trial of cheeky chappy Terry Ramsden. Ever the punter, it is considered short odds on a minimal appearance for Tel over the collapse of his Glen International.

WORD reaches me of some extremely well-timed purchases of more than 200,000 shares in Asda Property Holdings ahead of its bullish interim profits announcement last October. This surprise news pushed the price up to 45p compared with the close to the year's low of 34p at which the shares had been bought. The shares are now 65p having been 73p. Malicious tongues wag that the buyer was not exactly unknown, indeed might even be related to, a director. Inquiries continue.

"CHANGI" Jim Slater's latest recommendation in his not so *Independent* tipsheet, software provider Sage, duly rocketed 34p giving the tainted tipster a nice profit on any shares he held. What it does for *Independent* readers who are put in at a 1992/93 high history will relate.

Just why the *Independent*'s editor Andreas Whittam Smith and city editor Christopher Huhne continue to accept Slater at his own assessment as a "stock market guru" given his recent record of loss-making dealing companies (outlined in the previous *Eye*) remains a mystery.

So let us look in more detail at the some of the winners picked by the self-styled guru.

For many of the post-Slater, Walker years "Changi Jim" has been linked with a London-based, former Canadian, stockbroker, Ian Watson. Through Watson the Slater Foundation became a shareholder in two Texas oil companies, DCR Petroleum and Enercap.

In 1985 DCR became a subsidiary of a Canadian company Tellson Oil. Watson controls a Bermuda company called Tellson Holdings. The Slater Foundation became a Tellson Oil shareholder. In 1988 Tellson Oil went into liquidation and DCR re-emerged as an independent company again. Not, however, for long. The next year it was merged into Enercap, a small listed concern which had never made a profit and had accumulated losses of $13 million. Without the DCR deal Enercap was dead.

Despite the DCR deal, Enercap shares, $2.5 during 1989, by the end of 1990 were below 25 cents. A reconstruction and reverse stock split, virtually halving every holding, was necessary to keep the company alive. Tellson Holdings became diluted to a 4% shareholder. The Slater Foundation, which had held 0.5% of DCR now had 0.1% of Enercap.

Those eminent stock promoters and founder members of the Usual Suspects List, London brokers T.C. Coombs, were hired in 1990 to push Enercap, placing shares at up to $2 a time helped by the Slater involvement. Less than a year after they were appointed Coombs were closed down by The Securities Association and its two main men were arrested and charged with fraud.

Today Enercap shares have been delisted from NASDAQ and now barely survive in the twilight world of the US kerb market. For a long long time you could have been able to buy the shares for 25 cents, should you have such a madcap notion. Whether the circle of Slater followers could sell their shares, however, is an entirely different matter. Enercap is hardly the stuff of which gurus are made — unless that is you are the not so *Independent*.

ANOTHER self-declared guru is Sir James Goldsmith, a long time Slater booster. Those who witnessed his recent TV rant, forecasting with staring eyes and doom-laden tones an apocalyptic end for the world as teeming billions swamped its cities, would do well to recall that he too is far from infallible.

Ever since before the October 1987 crash but particularly in the last three years, Goldsmith has been telling all his friends to sell shares, sell the dollar and buy gold. To back his judgement, and confirm his newly proclaimed green (as distinct from greed) credentials, Goldsmith paid $1.1 billion to become the biggest shareholder in the largest American gold producer!

Alas Goldsmith's advice has proved less than golden. While shares have soared and the dollar has failed to collapse the price of gold has sunk to a seven year low.

Perhaps the not so *Independent* should hire Sir Jonah as another guest columnist.

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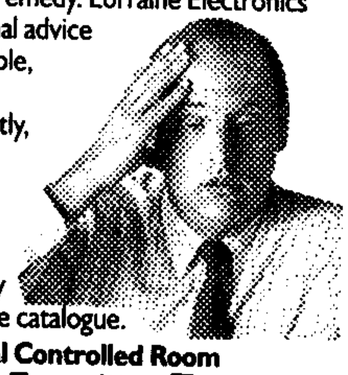

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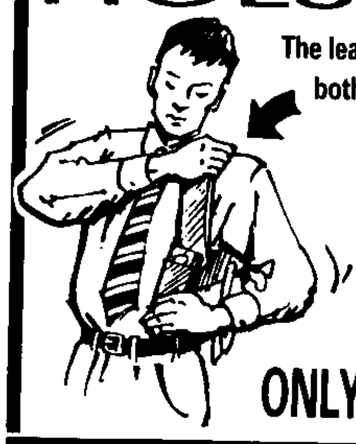

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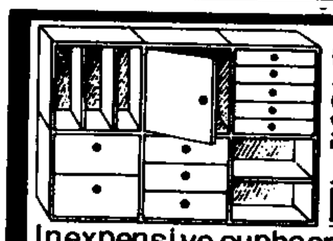

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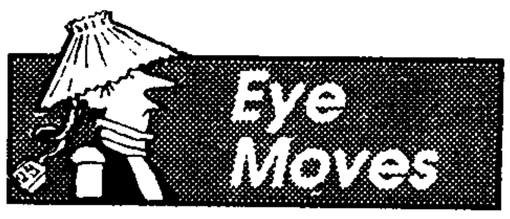

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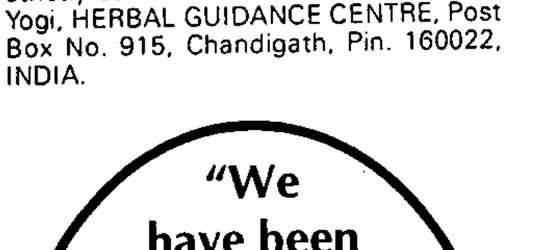

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ELIGIBLE BACHELOR, 29, tall, solvent, Oxbridge graduate seeks intelligent attractive girlfriend (25-30) for fun nights on the town. Please send letter and photo. Central London. Box 0416.

THERE'S ONE LEFT! Normal 35 year old professional male, lives North Kent, works London, seeks female 25-36 years, slim/medium build with SoH. Box 0516.

SUSSEX OPERA lover needs female companion to share passion. Box 0616.

MALE, 44, 6', often working Leeds/Huddersfield area needs company of attractive lady. Photo appreciated. Box 0716.

INTELLIGENT, WITTY, student M(31). Likes cats, vino, philosophical conversation. Seeks independent, aware woman counterpart for long-term laughs, love, happiness. W. Midlands, London. Box 6416.

TALL, ATTRACTIVE, 38 woman, caring, loves arts, seeks intelligent, sensitive, thoughtful man for commitment. Leicester/Northampton area. Box 6516.

CUDDLY, MERCHANT Navy officer, 32, requires wife. Box 6616.

SCOTS SALES Director, thirtysomething, smallish, separated. Regular visitor North-West England. Seeks attractive female to indulge. Box 6716.

WELSH BORDERS, eccentric, accordion-playing woman, smokes, drinks, seeks man with similar unruly lifestyle. Box 6816.

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GLASGOW MALE, divorced, 42, (er... that's it). Seeks female (er...). Box 7016.

BALANCED, INDEPENDENT attractive lady mid 20s sought for attractive urbane man loves sport, cinema, travel and drinking. Photo please. London/S. West. Box 7116.

BERMUDA-BASED professional man late 30s needs warm attractive female to share this lovely island. Enjoys sports, good food, wine, travel. Box 7216.

IMPETUOUS, OFF-BEAT slim sybarite (50s) seeks intellectual, tall male soulmate. Cambs. Box 7316.

TALL WOMAN, 36, attractive, intelligent, warm, loving, sensual, seeks similar, very tall man, for stimulation, passion, friendship, laughter. London. Box 7416.

SEXY, ATTRACTIVE, intelligent, disillusioned lady seeks tall generous romantic gentleman any status for mutual pleasure. London/Sussex. Box 7516.

ATTRACTIVE, ARTICULATE mucker desired to help young man, exiled Lincolnshire, rebuild cottage. Right girl gets heart, home and wheelbarrow races. Box 7716.

FIT AND HEALTHY guy, (45), fair share of both attributes and frailties, seeks woman, probably thirties, for serious attempt to (re)discover the meaning of life. Your letter, return address, ensures my reply. London but will travel. Box 7816.

HANDSOME Yorkshireman 40 seeks attractive warm curvaceous 45ish lady for initial correspondence. Box 7916.

AVANT-GARDE classic bluestocking. Box 8016.

SOUTH COAST MALE desires lass with deacon blue eyes. Beneath thirty will suffice. Only illiterate need reply. Box 8116.

SENSITIVE, SLIM, attractive professional lady (50s) seeks tall, intelligent, spiritually-minded man for lifelong relationship. Box 8216.

FED UP WITH married bliss. Unconventional male 50+ needs adventurous wanton woman who's missed out on fun, travelling, holidays and being spoiled. Photos returned. Box 8316.

DECENT CHILDLESS bloke wants to be a good father. Needs healthy normal woman to give him his child. More details from Box 8416.

SEXY GRANDMA! *Tall, slim, extrovert, n/s, fortysomething divorced redhead, not looking for husband no.2 but just someone to have a good time with.* Cheshire. Box 8516.

SENSUOUS INTELLIGENT married woman required by similar married man 37 for sensible sizzling affair. Absolute discretion. North West. Box 8616.

EXPERIENCE THE JOYS of spring! Sexy, slim, single London-based professional, 40, seks attractive, upmarket married lady for discreet frolics. Go on, spoil yourself! Box 10815.

SUCCESSFUL MUSIC business entrepreneur (London) seeks warm, understanding female as friend and occasional confidential assistant. Photo, plus phone number or SAE please. Box 8015.

LOVELY LIBRAN prof lady (36) loves theatre, dining out, travel, seeks knight in shining armour with romantic inclinations to enhance life. Box 0116.

ATTRACTIVE CONTINENTAL lady internationally business oriented, creative, artistic, enthusiastic, settled in London, wishes to meet well established gentleman for partnership. Box 0216.

FAST CAR, NICE suit young man, 32, seeks chic lady 32/45 to be seen with in right places, Cheshire, Staffordshire, NW. Photo please. Box 6916.

COUNTRY WARWICKSHIRE lad: begin with 5'10" slim single specimen, add good nature, looks and humour, simmer for 36 years in luxurious kitchen, stir in lots of varied interests for a tasty dish. What about you, lass? What's your recipe? Photo guarantees reply. Box 2516.

O.U. GRADUATE, 43, funny, quiet, seeks educated Rita (Chevrolet?) for discreet adventure. Lunch? South/West. Box 2616.

LONG TERM DISCREET relationship sought by tall slim early 40s successful businessman. You are intelligent attractive N/S mature female with soh looking for fun in your life. Discretion assured. Photo please. Don't be shy — do it. Box 4516.

PILOT REQUIRED 35+ by beautiful female with grace and charm for genuine friendship/love. Box 4616.

GORGEOUS 33YR OLD woman seeks affluent sophisticated single romantic gentleman 35-45 for long-term committed relationship London. Box 4716.

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PROFESSIONAL GUY, slim, fit, semidetached, reasonably goodlooking 47, n/s, looking for attractive n/s Girl Friday, preferably black, 20-35, to add exotic/erotic touch to energetic Scottish Islands holiday. Box 8716.

MALE 29, TALL, dark, fit. Seeks big woman for uncomplicated lust. Photo. Box 2016.

HANDSOMISH MAN, 40, sterile marriage, seeks woman similarly bored. M3/M4. Box 2116.

SHY INEXPERIENCED young man (23) needs kind lady (any age) for tuition. Photo please. Cumbria/anywhere. Box 2216.

SUSPENDERS! ATTRACTIVE City gent with country interests urgently required. Affluence, sexual appetite, availability, monogamy, cuddleability vital specifications. Own hair and teeth preferable. 43-55ish. For super loony lively lovely creative redhead going out of her skull in Barbican and Beds. Be shocked! Be delighted! Tarry not a while, post pic and epistle now. Please. Box 2316.

MALE STUDENT (26, 5'10") slim build, affectionate, shy, caring, seeks intimate friendship with female (20s/30s/40s). Discretion if necessary. Scotland/anywhere. Box 2416.

"Spike Milligan put an ad in Private Eye saying he wanted to meet a rich, well-insured widow. Intention: murder. He had 48 replies."
Derbyshire Life

SOUTH BUCKS female in 40s but young in body and spirit, slim tactile professional articulate, seeking sensual male for fun and cuddles. Box 1016.

QUEST FOR adventure. Graduate (28) seeks intelligent outdoor female (22-30). Photo appreciated. Box 1116.

GOOD-LOOKING ATHLETIC Cambridge educated professional woman seeks intelligent sporty successful boyfriend aged 36-42, London area. Box 1216.

ATTRACTIVE BLONDE tall slim successful woman 39 seeks intelligent professional man (35-45) for wining, dining, witty conversation, pub quizzes. Photos please. Box 1316.

HANDSOME AMUSING tall City broker 35, enjoys having fun, escaping rat race and City, likes Italy, sailing, exploring new places and beautiful women, seeks one of latter to participate in former. Box 1416.

LIKE MINDED lady sought by happily married man (33) for discreet but exciting affair to add zest to life. London area. Box 1516.

EXCEPTIONALLY NICE woman (so she's told) 42, with good looks, warmth, intelligence, style, wicked SoH and no hang-ups! Seeks tall good-looking male counterpart (48) for friendship/cuddles/laughter/more? Photo please (returned). Thames Valley. Box 8915.

WILTSHIRE. TALL attractive man 40, seeks humorous discreet woman, 30-50, also suffering sensory deprivation, W/S-W. Box 1616.

PETER PAN seeks Wendy for final fling. Age, colour, shape unimportant. Photo ensures reply. Please! Box 1716.

FORTUNATE ATTRACTIVE well-travelled romantic passionate sincere tallish and interesting (hopefully!) professional man (38) seeks interesting and intelligent woman (25-35) with SoH who would not normally respond to such an advertisement but is adventurous enough to realise that this is no more random a way of meeting someone than normal social contacts. Go on — try! Box 1816.

MAGNIFICENT, MARRIED, Midlands male beseeches busty, bestockinged belle for frivolous fornication! Foto? Box 4816.

MASTERFUL MAN looks and acts like Michael Caine, aged 44, looks younger, seeks a beautiful buxom lady 21-41 in distress for lunch and afterwards. Photo please. Box 4916.

HANDSOME IRANIAN businessman, educated, solvent, 32, 5'6", thinning black hair, moustache, brown skin, seeks sexy, intelligent, independent girlfriend for occasional fun meetings. London/anywhere. Box 5016.

EXCEPTIONALLY attractive, tall, upmarket, cultured male, 44, in celibate marriage seeks genuinely attractive, safely married woman for discreet wonderful relationship. London. Box 5116.

WHY AM I doing this? Because it worked once before didn't it Sally? Still hanging on... Mr Nice Guy.

MALE, 26, graduate, seeks vegetarian redhead for fun and orgasms. Box 5216.

TALL ADONIS wanted. Box 5316.

THIRTY SOMETHING single Scottish woman seeks man 25-45. Soh imperative. Box 5416.

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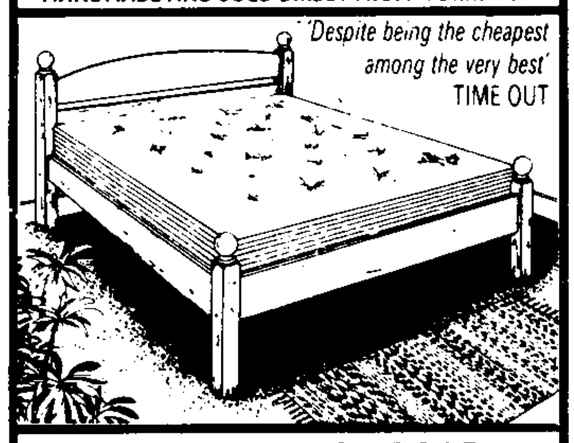

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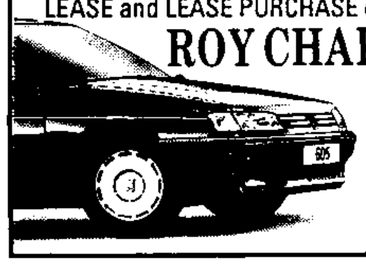

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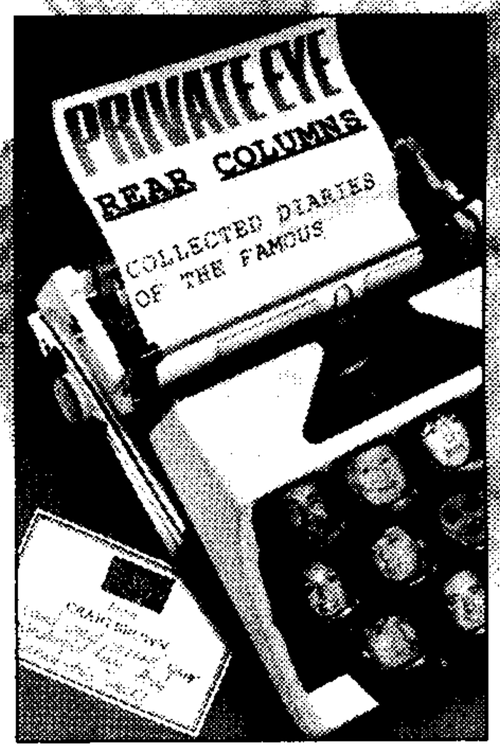

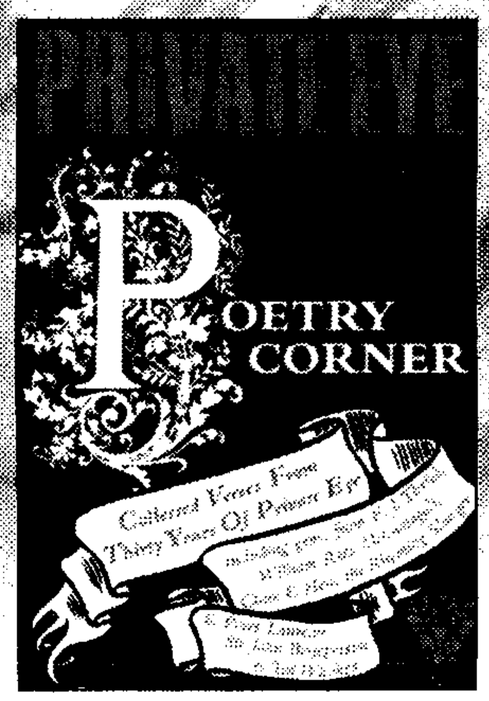

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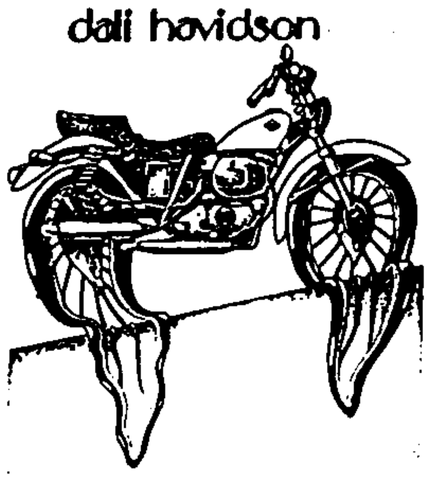

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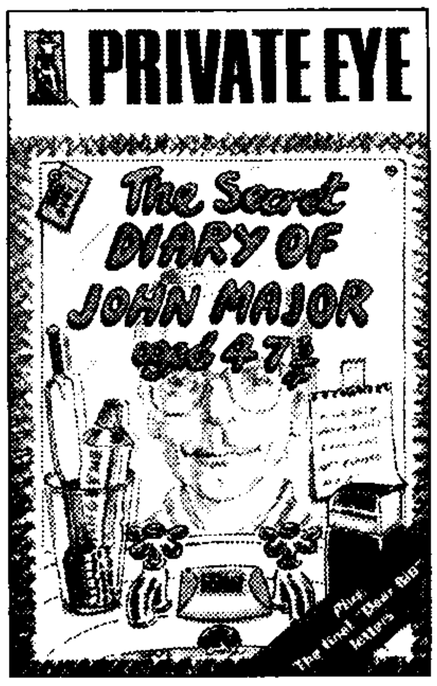

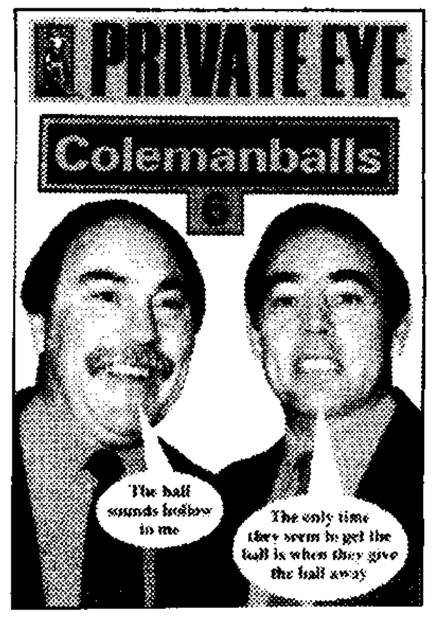
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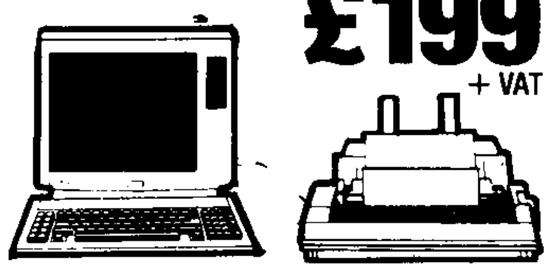

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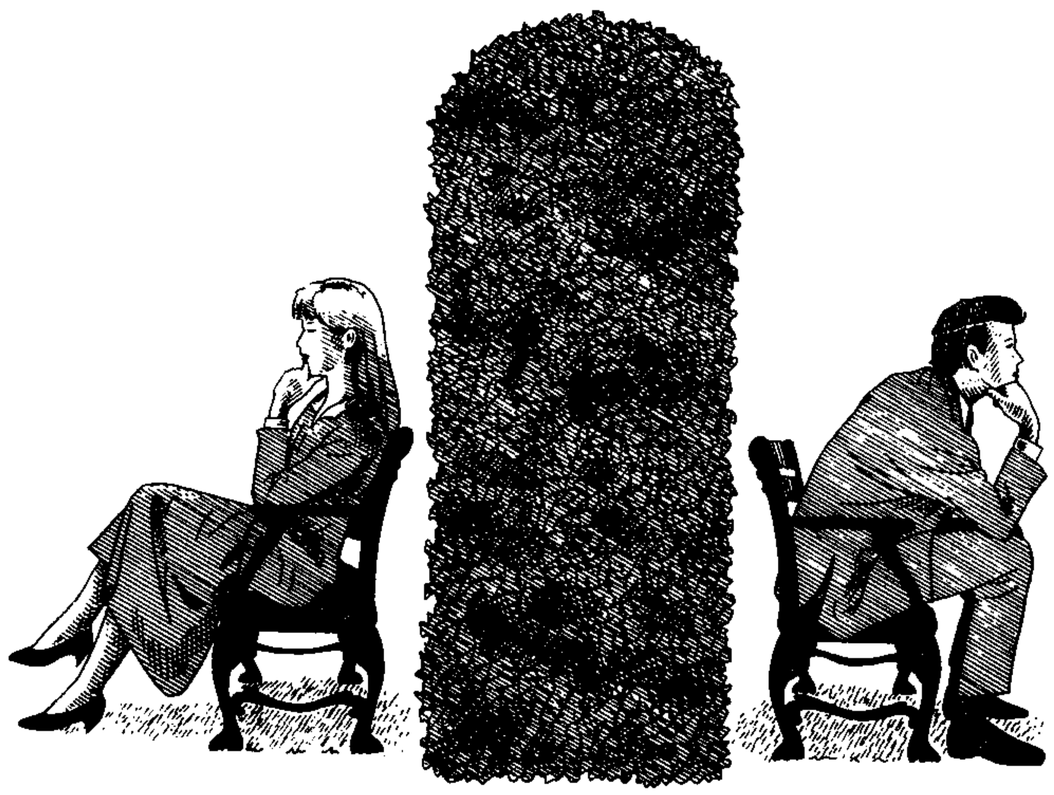

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